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THE
FOUR COMMANDERS

OR THE
MASCOT
MIDDY

CAREFUL NOT TO INJURE HIS COMRADES, HARRY AIMED HIS GRANADES AT THE CORSAIRS IN THE REAR OF THE STRUGGLING MASS.

The Mascot Middy;

OR,

THE FOUR COMMANDERS.

BY T. J. FLANAGAN,

AUTHOR OF "CRUISE OF THE OCEAN QUEEN,"
"MIDSHIPMAN DARE," "THE TWO MID-
SHIPMEN," "THE THREE LIEU-
TENANTS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMMODORE'S CHILDREN.

IN the early part of November, 1803, having renewed the treaty of 1786, between the United States and Morocco, Commodore Preble summoned the commanders of his small vessels, to deliberate as to their future operations.

The consultation was held in the cabin of the U. S. frigate Constitution, at Gibraltar, and when his lieutenants-commandant had withdrawn, the commodore seemed thoughtful and melancholy.

Colonel Lear, who had formed one of the council, having been for a long time employed in Africa, and being invested with certain powers to treat, at the proper moment, with Tripoli, observed the commodore's dejection, and inquired if he were unwell.

"I have been indiscreet in accepting this command," answered Preble. "Had I known how I was to be supported, I certainly should have declined it. The Government has sent me here a parcel of children, as commanders of all my light craft."

The children referred to were Stewart, Decatur, Smith and Somers—all very young men, it is true, but when reminded of this speech later, the commodore had learned their worth.

"I remember it well, colonel," he said, smiling, "but the children turned out to be good children."

On the 12th of November, 1803, the commodore gave a formal notification of the blockade of Tripoli, off which town he supposed one of his old commanders—Bainbridge—then to be, having the Philadelphia, Vixen, etc., with him.

On the 13th of the same month he sailed for Algiers, where he put a consul on shore, and then proceeded to Malta, there to be met by the intelligence that the Philadelphia had been captured, and Captain Bainbridge, with all his officers and crew, had been made prisoners at Tripoli.

This was very disheartening—a fine 38-gun ship, and an old and experienced commander, and, moreover, his only captain, lost at the very commencement of his operations! It was a most serious reverse, and a feather—a very big feather, in the cap of the rapacious enemy.

Commodore Preble, however, was not a man to waste time in useless regrets, and sailed at once for Syracuse, which port he reached about the end of the month; and then the children began to come to the front.

The commodore's object in going to Sicily was to establish a rendezvous, and to open negotiations with the authorities of that island, for certain aids that he felt would be necessary.

A few days later, the commodore, in the Constitution, sailed for Tripoli, accompanied by the Enterprise, commanded by Decatur.

The latter carried ten long six-pounders, was very fast and a most successful vessel.

The evening of the sixth day out from Sicily, Lieutenant Spence at the mast-head of the Enterprise, sighted a suspicious sail bearing toward Tripoli, and descending to the deck informed his friend and commander.

It was nearly night, the Constitution was some distance astern of the Enterprise, and with a glance at the position of the flag-ship, Decatur, after ascertaining the exact location of the stranger, said:

"George, find Laurie—he's somewhere below. We must give the commodore the slip to-night, and put after that fellow. We'll show the commodore some children's tricks!"

Spence nodded approvingly, and sought Laurie, to whom he repeated Decatur's words.

"Better keep her off a point or two," suggested Laurie, on joining his commander; "we must keep between him (the commodore) and the stranger until dark. Then clap on all sail, so we'll have the fun all to ourselves."

"Good! I knew old sobersides would hatch out an idea!" laughed Decatur, turning to Spence, and then addressing the latter:

"We must keep this quiet—among ourselves.

It won't do to set the men a bad example; so you, George, had better keep your glass on the stranger until dark, and signal Laurie how to steer."

"And you, Steve, had better remain below, not feeling well, until about midnight; then, if the Enterprise should get separated from the Constitution, you will not know it until daylight."

Laurie (as James Lawrence was called by his two friends) uttered this very gravely, and saluting his commander left the cabin.

"He is right," said Spence, "and I'll go aloft at once."

In a short time darkness came, and then Laurie ordered every sail set and trimmed to get all the benefit possible out of the freshening breeze. Studding-sail booms were run out on both sides, and sails sent aloft soaking wet, while men were stationed in the tops and cross-trees, to drench the canvas with the water in buckets, which their comrades whipped up to them.

This last was not only of service in increasing the speed of the Enterprise, but it rendered her canvas as dark as a collier's, and consequently less liable to detection by either the Constitution or the stranger.

At one bell in the middle watch (8:30 P. M.), Laurie went below to report:

"Everything lovely, Steve! The commodore must have got separated from us—he's not in sight—at least, I can't see him. We are logging nine knots, and it'll soon be blowing half a gale. I hope so, anyhow."

"I hope she will prove to be one of those infernal pirates," remarked Decatur, a little anxiously, and then with a smile, and sly look at Laurie:

"If not, Mr. Lawrence, you'll have some pretty tall explanations to make to the commodore, for running away in this fashion. I, of course, being ill, can do nothing to— In fact, I know nothing about it."

In the presence of others, Decatur, Lawrence and Spence, never forgot professional etiquette, but alone in the cabin they were still the midshipmen of the grand old frigate United States, and the "inseparables" of the same lucky vessel, which one of them now commanded:—"Steve," "Laurie" and "Gentleman George."

The reader will not, therefore, be surprised that Laurie's reply was not couched in the most polite language.

"Oh, you and the commodore can go to thunder," he exclaimed, laughingly. "But, look here, Steve—we're walking right up on her, and by midnight we can board her, if you say the word."

"By Jupiter, that would be splendid! We could meet the commodore at daylight with a prize. How he will stare—eh, Laurie?"

"Rather—especially as it will come from the children."

The idea of failure never occurred to these young men, and their unvarying success certainly justified such confidence.

About midnight, Laurie's prediction as to the position of the stranger was verified—she was within a quarter-mile of the Enterprise, under easy sail, and apparently unsuspecting of danger.

"Those fellows must be asleep!" exclaimed Decatur, who had come on deck a few minutes before.

"Asleep or not, she's what we've been hoping for," replied Laurie, adding:

"Shall I run her alongside or have her heave to?"

"Alongside," Decatur at once decided.

As he spoke, the moon, which had remained hidden up to this time, burst forth, and revealed the pursued as a vessel somewhat smaller, and of lighter draught than the Enterprise—a ketch.

With the appearance of the moon, considerable commotion was seen aboard the ketch, and an attempt was made to spread more canvas. It was too late, however, and in a few minutes the Enterprise ranged alongside, Decatur demanding the name and nationality of the craft.

Instead of replying, the stranger backed her topsail and hauled down her flag—which it was now seen for the first time, was that of the Bashaw of Tripoli.

This tame submission was so suspicious that Laurie counseled sending a boat, instead of running alongside and boarding.

"Very well; take the quarter-boat, and at the first sign of treachery warn me, and we'll close with her."

"It looks very queer," returned Laurie; "there's scarcely a dozen men on her deck, yet she's armed and heavily manned, I'll wager, so let us be on our guard."

He was right; the ketch was heavily manned,

but it was by drunken men and slaves, and on boarding her, Laurie found that it was one of the latter, a youth of fifteen, who had hauled down the flag.

This youth informed Laurie that the ketch had that day fallen in with a derelict, laden with wine, and before night all the officers, and most of the crew, were drunk; that the vessel was carrying one hundred female slaves as a present from the Bashaw to the Sublime Porte at Constantinople, and that every man now on deck was a slave—the commotion noticed by those on board the Enterprise being caused by the driving below of half of the crew.

Laurie immediately hailed his commander, and when the latter made fast to the ketch, informed him of what he had learned.

"Very well," returned Decatur, in a tone which signified that he was by no means pleased at his easy success; "secure the prisoners, and get under way as soon as possible."

The sleepy, stupid, drunken officers and men of the ketch were easily and quickly secured, and then both vessels were headed to cut off the Constitution, which was accomplished at day-break next morning, and they hove to to await her.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO ORPHANS.

THE Constitution was about ten miles distant when sighted, and over an hour elapsed before she came abreast of the Enterprise with her prize.

Commodore Preble was notified, as soon as it was seen that the Enterprise had another vessel in company, and, in common with all on board the flagship, was much exercised over the matter—especially as the ketch was plainly not of American build and rig.

As soon as the vessels were within hail, the Constitution came to, and Decatur was ordered aboard.

"What vessel is that?" demanded the commodore, as soon as Decatur made his appearance.

"A ketch with male and female slaves—the latter as a present from the Bashaw of Tripoli to the Sublime Porte, sir."

"And where the deuce did you get her?"

Decatur would have made a very poor diplomat. Lying, or prevarication, in any form, was as foreign to his nature as night is to day, and he replied:

"We discovered her yesterday near sunset, and captured her about midnight. Mr. Spence sighted her, and Mr. Lawrence boarded her."

"And you—what did you do?"

"I remained below most of the time."

"How many men did you lose?"

"None, sir; not a gun was used."

"Hum—well, it would be better, and as you know, proper, to notify me before attempting—But, we'll pass over that! Breakfast will be ready in a half-hour, Mr. Decatur; you will join me then, and invite your two lieutenants to accompany you."

"Humph! Three boys! A fine light vessel—good for harbor, too—just what I require," muttered the commodore as Decatur's boat pushed off.

He was not at all pleased that the children should have taken the ketch out of his very hand, as it were, but was too just not to give them credit, and too vexed, fortunately, to inquire further into the affair.

The commodore had a double object in going to Tripoli on that occasion. By showing his force before the town, he encouraged the captives, and gave his enemies reason to respect, if not fear, him.

But the principal motive was to reconnoiter the place, in order to direct his future movements with a greater degree of intelligence, and in this, the previous experience of the three officers of the Enterprise proved of great value.

Captain Bainbridge—with whom an active correspondence was kept up—also suggested many different modes of annoying the enemy.

December, however, is the worst month in the year off that inhospitable coast, and in a few days it began to blow so heavily from the northeast that on Christmas day the Constitution and Enterprise, with the prize, returned to Syracuse.

Before doing so, however, Decatur, Laurie and Spence had a long talk, the result of which was that the first-named boarded the Constitution.

"Commodore Preble, it's a shame to allow the Philadelphia to remain where she is," said the fiery commander of the Enterprise, on being shown into the cabin of his equally fiery superior.

"If you will allow me," he continued, "I will run in to-night and burn her!"

"My own idea!" muttered the commodore; and then began to discuss the feasibility of the project, but, the gale which forced their return, sprung up within an hour, and the attempt was abandoned for two months.

To the female slaves intended for the Sublime Porte, the rescue from captivity was scarcely a matter for congratulation, since they were brought up to look at life in the harem of the Grand Turk as preferable to any other; but to the dozen male and half-dozen femaleslaves who were Christians, Christmas day 1803 was a joyful one.

During the run back to Syracuse, Laurie and Spence, who were in charge of the ketch, discovered that the youth, Harry Lee, who had hauled down the Bashaw's colors, had a sister—a girl of about sixteen—among the slaves, and from him they learned their history.

The two were orphans, and two years previous the vessel in which they were going from London to Madeira, under the care of their uncle, who was in business on that island, had been captured by pirates, outside the Straits, after a desperate resistance. Very few prisoners had been made, and they supposed their uncle was killed during the fight.

Harry Lee had been allowed considerable liberty while in Tripoli, and was well acquainted with its surroundings, which led Spence, who appeared to be deeply interested in the ex-slave and his sister, to suggest that he should enter the service of the United States.

As there were a great many persons in the squadron who knew much more about Tripoli than Harry Lee, Laurie, who was present when the suggestion was made, smiled significantly, and when they were alone innocently asked:

"George, don't you think Laura Lee would be of great assistance to her brother in piloting us into Tripoli?"

"Don't be a fool—if you can help it!" snapped the Gentleman, and he walked off, looking fully as angry and indignant as his impolite language would indicate he felt, but he had nothing further to say about Harry Lee's entering the service.

On dropping anchor at Syracuse, however, the matter was brought up by Decatur mentioning to the commodore, that among those found aboard the ketch, were two Americans, of the name of Lee, who were anxious to get to Madeira.

"Lee? Where do they belong?" asked the commodore.

"I know nothing of them, sir, beyond what Laurie—I mean Mr. Lawrence—has told, which is, that when their parents died some two or three years ago, and, having no relations in America, the girl wrote to an uncle in Madeira, and he directed them to meet him in London. They did so, and on their voyage to Madeira were captured."

"And the uncle?"

"He is supposed to have been killed during the taking of the ship, but his sister, who kept house for him, is in Madeira, and the niece, especially, is anxious to get to her."

"And the boy? We could make use of him in manning your prize—especially as having been among them so long, he must have picked up some of their language."

"It is likely he has," admitted Decatur, and, returning the rub regarding the prize, added:

"Children learn fast."

"So I have heard," said the commodore with a sharp glance, "but I shall use *this child's* late prison for carrying water and stores."

"Ascertain if he is disposed to stay with us, and I will arrange to get rid of the girl at once. There is an English ship about to sail, and it will touch at Madeira. Good-morning, sir."

Decatur returned to the Enterprise, and sent a boat for Harry Lee, whom he found to be a bright, bold-looking, and finely-formed boy for his years.

Harry listened to the offer to take him into the service, and when Decatur concluded with: "You will be something of a nondescript until we return to America, but I have no doubt you will then be appointed midshipman," he replied:

"I am thankful to accept your offer, sir. It is enough that my sister should be dependent upon my aunt, and I shall be glad to begin work at once."

"There is nothing coming to you from your father's estate, I mean—" began Decatur, but checking himself, was about to speak of Miss Lee's departure, when Harry replied:

"Not that I know of, sir. A sealed packet, addressed to my uncle, was found among my

father's papers, and that I delivered to him in London. What it contained I do not know, but suppose it related to our care and management."

"We always supposed father was well-to-do, but there were only four or five hundred dollars left after paying funeral expenses, and some outstanding bills."

"Well, notify your sister to get ready, and if anything is needed let me know. You will report to me for duty to-morrow—or, hold! time enough to do that when your sister sails."

Three days after, Laura Lee sailed in the English ship for Madeira, and Harry reported for duty to Lieutenant-Commander Decatur, who immediately dispatched him with a message to the commodore, advising the latter that the youth had decided to enter the service, and asking what disposition was to be made of him.

The commodore was engaged with some representatives of the Sicilian Government at the time, and, having no time to give to such an unimportant matter, sent back word to report to Decatur.

Five minutes' conversation with the lad, however, would have revealed to the commodore, that the latter and his affairs were matters of no little interest to the Preble family; but, the conversation did not take place, and when Harry returned to the Enterprise, he was assigned to the ketch, in accordance with the intentions regarding him expressed by the commodore to Decatur.

Pending the conclusion of his negotiations for assistance, Commodore Preble had so disposed his vessels as to blockade Tripoli, protect trade, and look out for suspicious craft in the vicinity of Malta.

Shortly after his return to Syracuse, Decatur was ordered to assist in this last-mentioned work, and when the ever fortunate Enterprise set sail, her commander, at the earnest solicitation of Spence, took Harry Lee, the Mascot Middy.

As the vessel was got under way, Spence, who was standing forward with Harry, laughingly remarked:

"Now, young man, unless Decatur's pluck, and the Enterprise's luck, have deserted us, you'll receive your baptism of fire before you are much older."

"Many a true word is spoken in jest." Before another day dawned, the gallant little Enterprise had passed through a fierce conflict, and Harry Lee and many another brave fellow was under the care of her surgeon.

CHAPTER III.

THE BAPTISM OF FIRE.

THE Enterprise had sailed in the early morning, and at three in the afternoon was bowling along with fifty miles between her and the Constitution, when a sail was discovered on the lee quarter, but too far away to judge of its character.

The stranger came up very rapidly, and when the second dog-watch came on deck, at six o'clock, the craft was about three miles distant. The general opinion now was, that she was a French privateer, but one of the men who had just come up, declared he had seen a vessel very like her in the harbor at Tripoli, and, if it was the same, she was a pirate, having been captured from the French.

This man was one of those rescued from the ketch. Being a seaman, he had been received into the American service, and for the same reason, Laurie, who was officer of the watch, thought his opinion of sufficient weight to arouse Decatur, who was asleep and feeling unwell.

"There's a brig on our lee quarter, which one of the men declares is from Tripoli," reported Laurie.

"Ha! How far off? How is she steering?" asked Decatur, springing up at the first word.

"She's close hauled on the larboard tack, about three miles off, and looking us up as only swift heels can—even though we are not pushing the Enterprise."

"All right! Keep her as she is. Don't spread any more canvas. I'll be up in a minute!"

Decatur was buttoning his coat while talking, and snatching up his sword, reached the deck almost as soon as Laurie.

"She is fast!" exclaimed Decatur, as he looked at the stranger hugging the wind under a cloud of canvas, and eating her way into the steady breeze with the ease and speed of a frigate bird in a windward flight.

"Yes, sir, but it will be dark in a few minutes, and it would be well to wait for the moon,

before allowing her to come much closer. Besides, it will give us a chance to try our speed."

"Very true. Spread every inch of canvas. It's just the breeze to test her mettle."

The order was quickly executed, and as the Enterprise felt the pressure of the broad sheets of canvas just distended, she flew along at a rate that would have carried her away from most vessels, but it was soon apparent to all that she was no more than holding her own with the other.

Satisfied with this, Decatur asked Hansen—the ex-slave—if he knew how the brig was armed, and manned.

"Sixteen guns, and a hundred men, sir," replied Hansen.

"Hum! Four guns and twenty men more than we have! Well, that's pretty even!" muttered the young commander, as he turned to view the stranger.

"Even!" exclaimed the seaman, who had caught the words. "I wonder, now, what he would consider odds?"

"Pretty hard t'say. I don't think he knows what it means," replied Morris, the master gunner, who had himself been a prisoner-slave, and knew Hansen when both were in Tripoli.

The vessels maintained the same relative positions until eight o'clock, when the first lieutenant warned his commander that there would be moonlight in a few minutes, and asked if he should shorten sail.

"Yes, and then send the men to quarters with as little noise as possible," ordered Decatur.

This was barely accomplished when Laurie's expectations regarding the moon were realized, and it was seen that the pirate was once more gaining rapidly. Soon she was within a mile of the Enterprise, and then, apparently becoming suspicious, rounded to, sailing on the same tack as the American.

"Hang the fellow! He seemed anxious enough to close, but now when he has the opportunity, he stands off!" muttered Decatur, on seeing this cautious movement.

"Suppose we heave to?" suggested Laurie, who was standing beside him, watching every move of the sea-rover.

"Try it. He came on so boldly that I can scarcely imagine him running away," returned the commander; and now, with her topsail backed, the Enterprise awaited the coming of the pirate, which began to edge down toward her, after a few minutes.

"He's coming! He's coming down nicely!" gleefully ejaculated Decatur, and to Laurie:

"Be ready there to wear and give him a broadside the instant he attempts to rake us!"

Laurie quietly gave the order to fill the main-topsail, in order to get the vessel under command of the helm, and sent the sail-trimmers to their stations.

When within a cable's-length, the brig fired a gun, and the next instant a flag was seen fluttering from her gaff.

"English, by all that's holy!" exclaimed Decatur, in angry surprise and disappointment.

"Where's that idiot that claimed to know all about her?" he continued.

Hansen came aft, looking calm and confident, and said very firmly that he now was positive that the brig was a pirate.

"It's only a trick, sir," he added, "and I wouldn't wonder if she carries an English commission, to show when hard pressed. I heard that the Tripolitan consul at Malta had managed to get one for her."

"We'll soon see!" declared Decatur, grimly. "Mr. Lawrence, return that gun and hoist our colors."

This was barely accomplished when the brig, intending to pass close athwart either the fore-foot or stern of the Enterprise, luffed into the wind, laid all aback forward, and keeping her helm down while shivering, her after sails, attempted to break round off on her heel.

Decatur, seeing this, thought he could lay her athwart hawse, and ordered Laurie to draw ahead with that object in view.

The moon, however, disappeared behind a cloud at this moment, and in the sudden gloom each party miscalculated the distance, and just before the brig began to come up on the other tack, her jibboom got foul of the Enterprise's rigging.

Decatur, seeing what was about to take place, had ordered Spence to have a hawser ready, but it was not brought in time, and with some small rope picked up at random, he himself lashed the bowsprit to the rigging!

While this was being done, the guns of both vessels were at work wherever they could be

brought to bear, and the execution was necessarily great—frightfully, murderously great.

Neither commanders having intended boarding when the vessels accidentally came together, they were not prepared to take immediate advantage of the opportunity, but Laurie saw what his commander was doing, and when the latter, sword in hand, unmindful whether he was being followed or not, sprung to the deck of the brig, crying: "Boarders, away!" the gallant men of the Enterprise were at his back.

Instead of one hundred, however, the crew of the sea rover numbered nearly two hundred men! and while, perhaps, indifferent marksmen and sailors, the Turk is a most dangerous and desperate antagonist in hand-to-hand conflict.

The first surprise passed, the tide of battle turned, and slowly, but surely, the mass of struggling humanity had to surge toward the decks of the Enterprise, as weight of numbers began to tell, and the parties headed by Decatur and Laurie were driven backward.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, the deck was contested, but at length the men of the Enterprise were fighting on their own vessel, desperately endeavoring to keep the enemy on theirs; but the now enraged pirates still pressed forward, and the deck guns, which could now have been used to keep them back, had been dismounted in the short but fierce cannonading that preceded the boarding.

With the assistance of Spence, and those who had remained on board the Enterprise, the advance of the sea rovers was checked for a few minutes, but this could not last long, and Decatur was beginning to think it would be easier to capture the brig by cutting loose and getting his guns at work on her, when the youth, Harry Lee avoided the necessity of doing so.

As Spence and his companions rushed to the assistance of their sorely-pressed but undaunted commander, the young lieutenant cried:

"It looks as if it was cut loose, or blow up!"

Harry Lee, who heard the words, and remembered seeing a box of hand-grenades lying near the magazine, picked up a bucket and went below. Less than five minutes later the daring boy was on the mainyard of the Enterprise, hurling death and confusion from his bucket of grenades, which was suspended from the sheet block.

Careful not to injure his comrades, Harry aimed his grenades at the corsairs in the rear of the struggling mass.

This quickly created a panic among those in front, for as their comrades fell back in confusion they, too, retreated—supposing they were attacked in the rear.

Quick to perceive his opportunity, Decatur cheered his men forward again, and drove the pirates back to their vessel, and then the conflict was ended by an explosion that killed twenty men outright, and piled wounded in heaps above and below!

One of Harry's grenades had fallen on the lower gun-deck of the brig, where it ignited some loose powder. This set fire to a row of uncovered cartridges, which had been laid out for the guns at the beginning of the engagement, and then came the explosion.

The decks presented a horrifying appearance, when the smoke cleared away. Dead and dying, legs and arms without trunks, and trunks without limbs—and in many cases stripped of clothing—were lying in every direction.

CHAPTER IV. A DARING DEED.

THE officers of the Enterprise, and many of the men, surmised how the explosion was caused, and the first shock of horror and surprise over, looked for Harry.

"He is wounded! Up here some of ye and get him down!" cried Laurie, seeing Harry lying on the yard-arm, one hand clutching a rope, the other hanging down limp and motionless.

The pirates had discovered, and fired upon him just before the explosion. He was hit twice—in the shoulder and right arm, but continued tossing the grenades with his left arm—and it was one of those awkwardly thrown missiles that caused the explosion.

"He's built of the right stuff!" exclaimed Decatur, on learning how Harry had stuck to his self-appointed task, until the explosion and loss of blood rendered him almost unconscious.

It was some time before the victors realized the extent of the damage done during the short, fierce and exceedingly close-range cannonading, and the terrible destruction wrought by the subsequent explosion, and when Decatur ascertained the nature of the injuries to both vessels, he felt glad he was so near Syracuse.

Both vessels had been badly cut up in hull and

rigging, and of the officers and crew of the Enterprise, many of the latter were killed and wounded, and none of the former escaped unhurt.

In the last rush, Spence had received a bad cutlass wound in the head, and came to, to find himself in a hammock alongside his friend Harry, while Laurie limped around with a bullet-wound in his leg, and one arm in a sling, saying a cheerful word, or doing a kind act at every step.

So, with his principal officers wounded, and his ship unfit for service, Decatur made such repairs as were absolutely necessary, and returned to Syracuse, where his quick return and the appearance of the two ships created much surprise.

A short explanation between the commodore and Decatur, and then the former remarks:

"Not such a bloodless victory as the other."

"No, sir, and as we must wait some time to get ship-shape, I would suggest using the first prize to destroy the Philadelphia."

The commodore regarded the speaker curiously; the children were certainly coming to the front, he confessed to himself, as he thought of the three who handled the Enterprise, and the boy of fifteen, whose pluck had just saved that vessel to him.

"How do you propose destroying her?" he asked.

"Burn her, sir."

The Philadelphia, after being captured, had been towed under the guns of the forts, and used most effectively as a floating battery. It would be impossible to cut her out: the commodore knew it, and Decatur's idea was his, too, as well as Captain Bainbridge's, so he sat down and discussed the chances, with the result that the ketch was ordered fitted for the proposed service.

While this work was being done, Lieutenant-Commander Stewart, who, with the ill-fated Somers, had been blockading Tripoli, returned to Syracuse, and the commodore decided to send him with Decatur, so that the ketch might be used as a fire-ship if found expedient.

The undertaking was a desperate one, and that Commodore Preble appreciated this, is shown by the unrelenting care he gave in arranging for its success.

"Make your retreat good with the Intrepid [the ketch], if possible, unless you can make her the means of destroying the enemy's vessel in the harbor, by converting her into a fire-ship, and retreat in your boats, and those of the Siren."

"You must take fixed ammunition and apparatus for the frigate's [the Philadelphia's] eighteen-pounders; and if you can, without risking too much, you may endeavor to make them the instruments of destruction to the shipping, and Bashaw's castle."

Such were the commodore's instructions to his intrepid young commander, when the latter, in company with Stewart in the Siren, set sail for Tripoli on the morning of February 3d, 1804, and they show how uncertain and hazardous he regarded the enterprise.

At the time of the sailing of the expedition, neither Laurie nor Spence had recovered sufficiently to take part in that daring enterprise, and in any event Laurie's services were required in refitting his ship, so there was a quiet, almost speechless parting between these two and Decatur.

"I'm sorry I'm not going with you," was all Laurie could say.

"And I could hardly hope to," added Spence.

"Never mind, boys; you'll find a good friend in Dick Somers—if anything happens."

Almost immediately after sail was made on the Intrepid and the Siren, and the voyage, which resulted in one of the daring deeds of history, was begun.

The voyage to Tripoli was uneventful, but a gale sprung up shortly after the vessels had anchored, which drove them from the mouth of the harbor, thus delaying the operations of our adventurers, and causing a good deal of anxiety at Syracuse, but it enabled Decatur to see that the appearance of the ketch created no suspicion—she being of Mediterranean rig and build, and running in close when the gale abated, he took a boat and reconnoitered the small entrance to the port.

This was done at nightfall, and after returning to his vessel, and conferring with Stewart, the hero of Tripoli decided to run in the Intrepid in preference to boarding the Philadelphia in boats.

The night was dark, and accordingly both favorable and dangerous, since, while it hid him from observation, it also rendered him

liable to go aground, but fortune favors the brave. At nine o'clock that night the Intrepid ran alongside the Philadelphia.

As far as possible, everything had been arranged beforehand, and the instant the vessels touched they were lashed together—the sudden shifting of the wind precluding any possibility of using the Intrepid as a fire-ship.

As the vessels came together, Decatur, at the head of his seventy-four men, boarded the enemy—to find himself greatly outnumbered, and that, too, by men of fearful reputation for their prowess in hand-to-hand conflict.

In this case, however, the Turks had not ordinary men to deal with. Decatur would not quit the deck until his purpose was accomplished, and leading his men like a lion, they drove the enemy before them, firing the ship as they fought forward, until the flames forced both parties to retire—the Turks over the side and bulwarks, into the sea, and the Americans to the Intrepid, which was instantly cut loose.

The burning Philadelphia lighted up the harbor, revealing the Americans to those in the forts, and a storm of shot whistled after the ketch as she sailed away, but, notwithstanding this, Decatur's loss was four men wounded.

Decatur had brought ammunition for the guns of the Philadelphia, but finding them loaded when he boarded her, gave all his attention to driving off the Turks. The flames, however, interfered with his plans for using the ammunition, but they also did a part of the duty of gunners for him, and as the Intrepid drew away, the guns of the burning frigate began to echo across the water, adding to the impressiveness of the scene.

There was little time to gaze on the scene; the Tripolitan gunboats were already under way, in pursuit.

CHAPTER V.

AN ATTEMPTED ROBBERY.

SHORTLY after the departure of Decatur from Syracuse, Somers, in command of the Nautilus, arrived with a prize which he had captured off Tripoli, and being one of the despised children, as well as a warm friend of Decatur's, Laurie and Spence sought and gained his friendship.

The arrival of Somers with a prize, taken right at the mouth of Tripoli Harbor, only served to add to the commodore's growing conviction that he had underrated the worth of his young officers, and Somers was warmly welcomed.

During the work of refitting the prizes, and the vessels that had taken them, Somers, Laurie and Spence were accustomed to walk about Syracuse during the evenings, and about the time they were getting anxious regarding Decatur, whose return was delayed longer than expected, they met with an adventure that created considerable excitement, and raised these young men even higher in the estimation of the commodore, their comrades and the Sicilians.

America, even then, was known far and wide as the land of plenty as well as freedom, these officers had been taking prizes, and spent money freely—especially Spence, who was wealthy—and these facts probably led to the attempt made by five armed men to rob them.

Of the three Americans, Laurie possessed the only weapon among them—a dirk—and with this he met the "money or your life" demand, by springing on the leader of the robbers, who advanced with drawn swords.

"Down with the rascals!" cried Laurie, springing at the leader, and the robber was on the ground and dead, without having had a chance to use his sword.

Somers, meantime, had grappled with another of the ruffians, and Spence with another—the former seizing the blade of his antagonist's sword and, although severely cut in the hand, wresting it from him, plunged it into his body.

That ended the matter, Spence's antagonist managing to wrench himself loose, and join his remaining companions in their flight.

"Hold on!" cried Laurie, as his friends started in pursuit of the fleeing robbers, and when they returned, explained that as the spot they were in was a lonely one in the suburbs, and the thieves might have friends near by, it would be better not to go in search of danger.

"Better have these fellows carried to the inn, and thence to the town for identification," he concluded.

The argument was sound, and Spence went to an inn where they usually stopped when in the vicinity, and returned in a few minutes with several men who were engaged to take charge of the bodies until next day, when they should remove them to the city.

Next day the bodies were recognized as those of two soldiers who, with three others, had left garrison the previous evening. One of the latter was quickly caught, and before night it was known throughout Syracuse that five soldiers, armed with swords, had attacked three unarmed American officers—one a mere youth, and not yet recovered from wounds received in action—with the amazing result, that two of the soldiers were killed, and the others compelled to fly for their lives.

This last, which was owing to the statement of the fellow who had made the confession, that it was "through the mercy of God, and their own extreme agility, that he and the others escaped being murdered (!)" caused much amusement among the Americans, but the commodore knew the value of such prompt and vigorous action (which is neither imaginary nor exaggerated), in teaching foreign nations that the citizens of the young Republic would stand no infringement of their rights. He always acted on that principle himself, and shortly afterward gave a striking illustration of it to H. M. S. Donegal, a 60-gun razeed.

Preble, in the Constitution, 44, cruising in the vicinity of Gibraltar, one dark night, suddenly found himself quite close to a strange vessel-of-war.

He immediately beat to quarters, and was ready to engage by the time the vessels closed. Hailing now commenced, both vessels more anxious to ask than answer questions.

Vexed with delay, Preble ordered:

"Give them our name and country! And tell them we'll give them a shot, if they don't give theirs!"

This was done, and the stranger promptly replied that he would return a broadside for a shot.

In an instant, the commodore was in the mizzen rigging, trumpet in hand, and in a clear, strong voice, announced:

"This is the United States ship Constitution, 44, Commodore Edward Preble!"

"I am about to hail you for the last time. If you do not answer, I shall give you a broadside."

"What ship is that?"

"Blow your matches, boys!"

This last to warn the gunners, but it was unnecessary, the stranger promptly answering:

"This is his Britannic Majesty's ship Donegal, a razeed of 60 guns."

But Preble was angry and suspicious now, and declared he did not believe it, and would stick by the stranger until morning, to make certain of his character.

A boat, however, soon came from the other vessel, and having explained matters to the commodore's satisfaction, they parted, but he had done something which created a great impression, and produced a revolution in his favor among his young officers.

They saw he could be as prompt with an English man-of-war as with them, and soon they had a saying:

"If the old man's temper is wrong his heart is right."

Few men would have dared to "beard the lion," when England was nearly what she claimed to be:

"Mistress of the seas."

Right on the heels of the affair of the three American officers came Decatur and Stewart, to keep the excitement alive.

Much anxiety was by this time felt by all concerning the fate of the expedition, and by none more than the commodore, who thoroughly understood the dangers attending the enterprise, but, at the end of fifteen days, the long-expected craft hove in sight, and Preble soon had the pleasure of seeing the signal of success flying on the Siren.

The ovation that greeted the conquerors, overwhelmed them with surprise—the Sicilians, who were also at war with Tripoli, joining in firing salutes, and rending the air with shouts and cheers, with as much delight as the Americans themselves.

This success was of great moment to the future prospects of Preble, and he was not chary of expressing his pleasure at the success of Decatur in recapturing and destroying the frigate, thus wiping out the stigma attached to her loss—for, in war, misfortune ever leaves a reproach.

Then, too, Decatur had met the Turk at his own play, and where every sea officer was cautious of meeting these bloody-minded *sabreurs*, namely, on the plank sheer of his own vessel, and proved that the Christian was the better man.

As the season was advancing, and the import-

ant work of destroying the Philadelphia disposed of, the commodore prepared still more earnestly for the coming summer. Stewart, in the Siren, with Somers, in the Nautilus, under his orders, was again sent off Tripoli, to blockade, while he, himself, in the Constitution, proceeded to Malta, thence to Tripoli, and from there to Tunis, leaving "the three inseparables," with the Enterprise and Intrepid, to amuse themselves as best they could in and about Syracuse. How they managed to do so will be told in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIRDS IN THE TRAP.

SHORT as the separation of the "inseparables" had been, the reunion caused great pleasure, for they were sincerely attached to each other, and now a fourth, Harry Lee, was added to the little band of heroes—and a valuable addition he proved.

On the departure of the commodore, Decatur allowed those under his command a great deal of liberty, while he, with Laurie, looked after the work of refitting, and Spence and Lee were among those particularly favored with leave of absence, because of the severe wounds they had received, although now fully recovered.

The third day after the commodore's departure, Gentleman George came to his commander to request leave for two days, with his friend, Harry.

"Where are you bound for, George?" asked Laurie, who, with Decatur, was busy shifting the mainmast of Somers's prize.

"We're going as far as possible for one day, and will come back the next. We have a Sicilian soldier—a sergeant—to guide us."

"A Sicilian soldier, eh? Well—take care of yourself—also, that he don't 'come the old soldier' over you," warned Laurie, in a half-jest—whole-earnest tone that attracted Decatur's notice, and as Spence started off, he asked:

"What did you mean by that warning?"

"Oh, we had some trouble with a few Sicilians while you were away, and I feared they might revenge themselves on George," replied Laurie.

He was half-ashamed of what he had said, but Decatur, understanding the revengeful nature of these people, who carry their "life for life" motto from generation to generation, took alarm at once, although having no idea of the character of the trouble.

"Better follow George," he said, adding as Laurie prepared to go:

"Be careful, Laurie—these people never forgive an injury."

With this warning ringing in his ear, and knowing the nature of the injury—though by no means appreciating the extent of the danger—Laurie hurried to the barracks, arriving there just in time to catch his friends setting off with their friend, the sergeant.

The latter was a tall, slender, graceful fellow, of engaging manners, and a good conversationalist. He exhibited such genuine pleasure on learning that Laurie was to make one of the party, that the latter was ashamed of his suspicions.

So entertaining was Sergeant Galileo, that no one noticed the speed at which they were traveling, and when they halted at an inn for the night, all agreed that their guide was a fine fellow.

"A rather rough-looking place," commented George, as, alighting from the carriage, he stood surveying the inn.

"Ay, and if the landlord's heart is no better than his face, and his fare than his house, we shall have a sorry night," returned Laurie, laughingly referring to the low-browed, ugly-looking innkeeper, who was talking to Galileo, and to the wretched appearance of the inn.

As the carriage was approaching the inn, the sergeant suggested that, as it was several miles to the next inn, which was in a town, they should stop, and see if lodgings could be obtained at this one.

"If we stay here to-night, we will have a magnificent drive through to the town in the morning, which we will miss by going on now—it is so near dark," he added.

The Americans accepted this as a very good reason for stopping, and when the inn was reached, the sergeant jumped down to make the inquiry. The others alighted to stretch their legs, and as Laurie made the above-quoted remark, their guide turned toward them, saying it was all right—they could be accommodated.

George and Laurie accordingly followed him into the inn, where the latter ordered a bottle of what he informed his companions was "most magnificent Madeira."

This was served immediately, and hastily

draining his glass, Galileo, calling their attention to "the fool of a driver," who was still standing at the door, left the young men, while he went to order the horses put up.

What he said was:

"Go to Captain Paulo. Tell him the birds are in the trap, but that there is one more than expected."

He did not see Harry Lee, and looked startled when the latter called out from where he sat beside the entrance:

"May I see the birds, sergeant?"

Harry was a very shrewd boy, for adversity had sharpened his wits. He saw the startled expression of the sergeant's face change to a scowl, and then to a smile, as he returned to the entrance, saying:

"Certainly—when Captain Paulo arrives you shall see them."

"Thank you—I like birds," returned Harry.

He arose as he spoke, and strolled down the road.

"Yes, you shall certainly see them," muttered the sergeant, as he entered the inn, where he ordered more wine, and entertained his friends, while the landlord was preparing supper.

Meantime, Harry was strolling along, pondering over what he had seen and heard, perfectly satisfied that something was wrong, but unable to imagine what, or why there should be, until he suddenly remembered the affair with the soldier-thieves, and immediately connecting the sergeant's profession with that of the dead men, guessed that his friends and himself were the birds—Laurie being the unexpected one.

Having solved the enigmatical words of the sergeant, Harry was about to turn back when a poorly-dressed woman suddenly came from among the trees and bushes lying the road, and asked, in Italian, if he spoke that language.

Rather startled by her unexpected appearance, Harry drew back as he replied that he did, but the woman begged so earnestly that he came to her.

"If I were seen talking to you," she said, "my life would be ended before morning—and I am not yet absolved!"

The last words sounded like the wail of a lost spirit, and Harry felt certain he had met a madwoman, but her next words undeceived him.

"You are of the people now there—with my unfortunate, sinful, lost husband?" she asked, pointing toward the inn.

Harry nodded—too surprised to speak—and she continued:

"Then you must warn them to run—fly—fly for their lives—their death is already decided on!"

"To-night, Paulo and his band will be there—"

She stopped abruptly, and grasping Harry's arm, stood in a listening attitude. She was not deceived—the heavy tramp of hob-nailed boots could be heard approaching, and with a moan the woman shrunk back among the trees, dragging Harry with her.

"Lost, lost!" she moaned, as a body of men, headed by a gigantic fellow bearing a long-handled ax passed their hiding-place. "Lost! lost! 'Tis Paulo and his band! I shall never be absolved—never!"

CHAPTER VII.

HEMMED IN.

LAURIE and George were so taken up with the wit and humor of their new-found friend, that Harry's absence was not remarked until the innkeeper came in to say that supper would be ready in a short time.

"But was there not another?" asked mine host, as he turned to go back to the kitchen.

"By Jove! Yes—where is Harry?" said Laurie, starting up.

"Don't be alarmed, he is only taking a walk—I saw him going," the sergeant interposed, before George could speak.

Their anxiety thus quieted, Laurie and George—who had also started to his feet—resumed their seats, but scarcely had they done so, when the door was thrown open, and a stranger entered.

The new-comer was a man about four feet in height, with an enormous head and breadth across the shoulders, very long arms and powerful chest—but his legs were very short, and mere spindles.

"A giant from the hips up, and a baby below," whispered Spence, as the dwarf in thundering tones demanded the landlord to furnish a bottle of brandy—immediately!"

The liquor was produced with such quickness, and served with such respect, that it was plain

the innkeeper feared his queer-looking customer who, however, paying no attention to the others in the room, threw a small leather case on the table and attacked the brandy.

As the dwarf was pouring out the liquor, Harry, breathing hard, and looking a trifle excited, entered and took a seat at the table, beside Laurie.

Spence, sitting on the other side of the table beside Galileo, asked:

"What's wrong, Harry? You look as if you had been running."

"I have. I was afraid I would be too late to see the birds Sergeant Galileo had trapped. He promised I should see them when Captain Paulo arrived. He sent the carriage for him."

Paulo! The name seemed to have a magic effect on all in the room.

The landlord came in from the kitchen; the sergeant changed color, and looked confused; the dwarf raised his head from the case which he had opened and was examining, to look at Harry, while Spence started up with his hand on his sword, exclaiming:

"What! Sent for Paulo the brigand?"

Laurie, who had remained seated, with his eyes fixed on Galileo, while one hand rested on the butt of a pistol, noted the expression of the latter's countenance, and Decatur's words came back to him.

"Is there not some mistake, friend Galileo?" he asked, in an easy, careless way, that gave no sign of the tumult raging within as the words: "These people never forgive an injury," kept flashing through his brain.

"Merely a jest," said the sergeant, recovering his self-possession.

The dwarf laughed hoarsely on hearing this, but before more could be said the door was opened and a fellow, evil-looking enough to be brother to the landlord, peered in.

"Ho, ho, ho! Merely another jest," roared the dwarf, as the landlord joined the fellow at the door.

In a minute or two, the fellow disappeared from the doorway, and in quavering tones the landlord asked the dwarf if he intended to remain for the night.

"If I like," was the uncompromising reply, adding:

"Perhaps I may make a sale—that will decide me."

Then to Harry, who, feeling he was friendly, had kept his eyes fixed inquiringly upon him, the speaker continued in very good English:

"Come hither, younker, an' thou mayst find something to interest thee."

Harry obeyed, and under pretense of showing the treasures of his case of nicknacks, the dwarf said:

"You are in a den of thieves and murderers, but while I am here they will not, I believe, harm you."

"There is not room enough for all, therefore when I insist upon remaining, do you offer to share your room with me in exchange for one of these trifles—which you have not money enough to buy."

This was said rapidly in an undertone, the speaker moving from article to article, and having finished he held up a small vial, and loudly asked:

"What is the use of talking, younker? Having no money, how dost thou expect to possess thyself of this precious liquid? If by stealth or force—see! I fear no man! No—not Paulo and all his cut-throat crew!"

Closing his case with an angry snap, the dwarf laid the vial referred to on the table, as if defying any one to attempt to take it, and called loudly to the landlord that he intended to stay for the night, and would have some supper.

"The meal with pleasure, good sir," said the landlord, "but my room is taken already."

"I care not—here I stay—on the floor if need be," growled the dwarf.

This was Harry's cue, and he made the offer as arranged, which was promptly accepted, and the precious vial handed over.

The landlord looked dismayed, the sergeant perplexed, Laurie and George surprised, while Harry looked so happy—over the acquisition of this powerful ally, and not, as the others supposed, over the possession of the vial—that there was no question of the genuineness of his joy.

This last was the cause of the sergeant's perplexity, for it rendered him uncertain whether the dwarf had warned Harry; but supper was now ready, and being served, put an end to his conjectures, for it was necessary to keep up appearances a little longer.

Supper was about finished, the sergeant as talkative and entertaining as he had been all

day, Laurie quiet and watchful, Spence unconsciously following his friend's example, while Harry, more at ease than either, was paying strict attention to his plate, when suddenly angry voices were heard outside, the next instant the door was flung open, and in strode seven men, headed by a fellow nearly seven feet in height, with a long-handled, spike-headed ax thrown over his shoulder.

It was Paulo, the brigand, a most ferocious-looking being, with six of his notorious band, and as they entered, the tramp of a number of men entering the kitchen from the rear came to the ears of the hemmed-in Americans.

The birds were indeed in the trap, and Paulo had grown tired of waiting to dispatch them.

CHAPTER VIII.

AWAITING THE ATTACK.

As Captain Paulo entered the inn, Laurie looked significantly at Spence, and opening the loose blouse he wore, rested his hands on the butts of a pair of pistols, saying:

"George, these are a ruffianly-looking set of fellows—look to your pistols, and shoot at the first insult!"

"Don't stir, friend Galileo! Harry is an excellent shot, and will take care of you, if I cannot."

Was there a hidden menace in Laurie's words, or was it imagination?

The sergeant could not answer the question, nor did he dare disobey the injunction, for at the first word Harry had followed the example of his superior, and the guilty wretch wisely reasoned that if they suspected him of treachery, the first move he made would send a ball crashing through his skull.

He therefore sat still while the giant brigand, taking this as a signal that the time was not ripe, thundered out an order for wine.

The landlord, who was in league with the brigands, hastened to obey, but, before he could fill a flagon, the dwarf, in tones sounding more like rumbling thunder than human utterance, swore by the bones of St. Anthony of Padua that if he were not first served with his supper, he would crop the landlord's ears.

"Thou!" cried the giant contemptuously. "I am minded to slit—"

He paused abruptly on meeting the scornful gaze of the dwarf, and addressing the innkeeper, said:

"Save thine ears, and do it quickly, or I will crop them."

All this was in Italian, which neither Laurie nor George understood, but the former, seeing that the brigands feared the dwarf and surmising something of what had passed previous to the exchange of the bottle for the bed, told Harry to tell the dwarf to come up-stairs as soon as his supper was finished, as they were weary and wished to retire.

"I'll come when it pleases me," growled the dwarf in Italian, but with a significant look at Harry, who without interpreting the reply arose from his chair.

This was Laurie's signal, and ordering the landlord to bring up a dozen bottles of wine—they would make good weapons, he thought—he, too, arose, saying:

"We had better retire, and leave this room to these ruffians. Come, are you not going, friend Galileo?"

The three Americans were on their feet surrounding the sergeant, who arose, and with a wan smile replied, that he should like to wait and see if there would be any more trouble between the giant and the dwarf.

"As you please," returned Laurie, carelessly, "but I should think you would prefer our company."

The landlord now produced candles, and "the birds" ascended to the inner trap.

As soon as they were in the room Harry told all he knew, and that the innkeeper had gone for help, and after expressing his regret at not having compelled Galileo to accompany them as a hostage for the dwarf, Laurie examined the room, which he quickly discovered had been designed for a trap; easy of entrance, but impossible to get out of, except through the bar.

The door was a frail structure, secured by a bolt which shot into a post, which moved on a pivot and could be turned from the outside, and was, therefore, of course, useless, while the two windows were secured by iron bars.

"The birds are indeed in the trap, but these birds are not doves," said Laurie, smiling grimly.

"Hark! Here's some one coming!" exclaimed Spence, half-drawing a pistol, but the footsteps came so boldly that he concluded it was the dwarf, and shoved the weapon back.

A moment after the door was kicked open, and the dwarf entered bearing a basket of bottles and pewter flagons in one hand, and his case in the other.

Setting down his burden the little giant proceeded to knock the neck of a bottle—making considerable noise about it—and filling a flagon handed it to Laurie, saying loudly:

"Drink! Drink! A short life and a merry one!"

This was accompanied by an expressive wink, and followed instantly by:

"I am here to get you drunk. Your friend was afraid to undertake the task. Now, if you can, sing and make all the noise you like—gradually."

"They are cowardly cut-throats, and fearing you suspect them, do not care to begin their bloody work until you are drunk, so, if you sing and make plenty of noise, you are safe for at least an hour, and we may be able to keep them off until help comes."

"Sing a song, Harry," said Laurie, following the dwarf's example, and speaking loudly.

With all the nerve of a veteran, the boy obeyed, and his clear tenor voice rung through the crime-stained den, while the others concocted means of defense.

The plan finally adopted was that the two beds should be got in readiness, one on top of the other, and placed near the door. Then, at the end of an hour, lights should be extinguished, and all noise cease.

"Then, in a little while, one of them will come up to see if you are asleep," said the dwarf, "and I will take care of him. That will be one less."

"What! Do you intend to remain with us?" asked Spence in surprise, while shuddering at the cold-blooded way the dwarf spoke.

"Remain? Certainly. They will think I have got drunk with you, and will be glad to have a chance of cutting my throat as well as yours."

"But don't stop the drinking!"

With the last and only loud-spoken words, the speaker picked up the already empty bottle, and proceeded to knock off a little more of the neck, at the same time calling for another song.

This programme was followed for about an hour, three working and one singing until everything was in readiness, and then all joined in singing and boisterous talking.

At the end of an hour, the brigands below could be heard demanding how soon the misshapen son of the devil would have his work done.

Then came the words of Paulo:

"Patience! He, too, is getting drunk, and all will go together. He knows too much."

"Yes—for you," chuckled the dwarf.

"Now put out the lights," he continued, "but sing a little longer and not so noisily."

Shortly after, at a signal from the dwarf, all noise ceased. All had previously removed their boots and thrown them noisily on the floor, and they now awaited the coming of the spy—the three Americans with drawn swords, behind the barricade of beds, and the dwarf with a long knife, beside the false doorpost.

It was nerve-trying work, that waiting. Five, ten minutes passed, and the suspense was becoming unendurable, when suddenly the rickety stairs were heard creaking—the scout was coming and all breathed a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER IX.

A BLOODY BATTLE.

EVIDENTLY the spy feared he had made too much noise coming up, for he paused several minutes outside the door, and during that brief interval, the moon came shining like a beacon of hope through one of the narrow windows, its light falling on the false door-post.

After what seemed an age to the anxious watchers, the doorpost began to revolve, then the door was slowly pushed inward, and then there was a lightning-like flash in the moonlight, and without a sound the blood-stained brigand passed to his final account.

He had come on his hands and knees, and as he passed the dwarf, one hand of the latter droye the long knife through his back, while the other silenced any possible outcry.

"Number One," said the dwarf, as, picking up the body, he carried it around the barricade and placed it in a sitting position in a chair—"to keep it out of the way, for we'll be hand-to-hand before long"—he explained.

"How many more are there?" asked Laurie.

"Fifteen or twenty. Don't stir anything—they may send another to see what detains this one."

The dwarf stepped outside, and listened to the talk of the murderous crew below, but for a few

minutes could not distinguish what was being said.

Soon, however, the voices grew louder and angry, and some began to accuse the man who had been killed of being engaged in robbing the intended victims, and demanded that another be sent after him.

"There is another coming!" whispered the dwarf, taking his position behind the doorpost, and leaving the door slightly open.

All thought the same tragedy was to be enacted, but it was not to be.

The second spy came at once, contrary to the dwarf's expectation, and so quickly and noiselessly that the latter was surprised and unprepared when he pushed open the door, and stood erect at the threshold.

"Holy Virgin!" shrieked the brigand, and before the dwarf could reach him, tumbled backward down the stairs, rolling into the bar among his astonished comrades.

The dwarf had noticed the man start back on looking into the room, and turning, himself, while listening to the clamor below, saw the cause.

While awaiting the appearance of the second brigand, Harry had been fumbling in his pockets, and feeling the vial given him by the dwarf, pulled it out. To his great astonishment, he found it threw considerable light, but having seen it used before while in school, he quickly realized it was phosphorus, and immediately remembered that the first time he had seen it, was when one of his schoolmates had frightened the wits out of half the school by daubing his face with it.

If intelligent boys could be so frightened, why not these ignorant, superstitious fellows below?

It was but a moment's work, yet even the dwarf, who knew what he had given Harry, was startled at the sight of the dead robber sitting bolt upright in the chair, a bluish flame playing about his eyes and mouth and issuing from his nostrils.

"A good idea!" exclaimed the dwarf, while Harry explained what he had done.

The clamor down-stairs was increasing, and the dwarf, by listening, gathered that all the second spy could or would say was that he had seen the spirit of Luigi—possessed of the devil.

"Quick! The beds to the door! Paulo is getting impatient!" cried the dwarf, closing the door.

"Now place the bottles on top," he continued, when the entrance was barricaded; "they will be within easy reach when the door is forced."

"Hark! Here comes Paulo himself! Push with all your strength—our only hope of safety lies in delaying them."

An awful roar caused the dwarf's exclamation, and then there was a terrible clatter on the stairs as Paulo, maddened by the cowardice of his followers, dashed up, and, striking the door with tremendous force, almost drove it back; but the obstacles on the other side, backed by the united strength and weight of the besieged, was too much, and he began to thunder on the frail door with his ax.

"It will not last two minutes!" warned the dwarf.

"You" (to Harry), "fire, and keep firing at him as soon as there is an opening. We must use the bottles—Ha! Here come the rest of the cut-throats!"

The noise on the stairs proved the speaker correct.

Encouraged by the example of their chief, the frightened brigands were coming to his assistance.

At that moment the ax crashed through the door, making a good-sized opening, and Harry fired.

A furious curse followed the shot, but it appeared to increase the energy of the infuriated giant, and, seeing the door would be speedily demolished, Laurie said:

"Pull the beds back into this angle when I give the word. They will come in tumbling over each other, and we can give them a volley of bottles. Then, while two load and fire pistols, we will keep the others off with our swords."

"Ready, now—pull!"

Back came the beds with a rush, just as Paulo delivered a mighty stroke; but the door had swung inward, and the impetus of the blow, which met no opposition, caused the giant to tumble headlong into the room, followed by those behind him.

In all, there were some eighteen or twenty in the besieging party, and a half-dozen of these, who were not very eager, remained erect when the door gave way, but the sight of the fiery-faced figure in the chair was enough to drive

them down-stairs, howling prayers and curses, so that the besieged gave their sole attention to those struggling up from the floor.

"Now, then! Fire away!" cried Laurie, and bottle after bottle—heavy-bottomed and weighted with wine—was hurled among the bewildered brigands.

Soon the bottles and flagons were exhausted, and while Laurie and George stood sword in hand, the dwarf and Harry fired four shots each before the expected rush came.

The brigands, fortunately, were armed with short swords and knives only—except the leader—but the mode of attack was an unexpected one.

With a shout to his men to *drag the beds away*, Paulo dashed at the besieged with his ax—with which he could easily reach across the beds—and gave them all they could do to avoid his terrific stroke.

The giant brigand seemed impervious to lead, and the fury of the assault caused his followers to pass the still-flaming figure of their comrade unnoticed, while dragging the barricading beds away.

Laurie, who had depended a great deal on the effect of the phosphorus-painted figure, now gave up all hope.

"Nothing for it but do *and die*, boys!" he cried, as the beds were pulled away.

Discharging his pistol as he spoke, and hurling the useless weapon at the nearest brigand, Laurie sprung forward, sword in hand.

It so happened that the position he took—and his companions followed him—was beside the chair in which was the dead brigand, and even Paulo shrunk back on seeing the painted figure.

In a moment Paulo recovered from his fright, and, with a savage curse, sprung forward again, swinging his terrible ax, aiming the blow at Laurie.

The momentary hesitation of Paulo probably saved Laurie's life, as it enabled the dwarf to produce a long-barreled, wide-mouthed pistol, which he fired at the instant the brigand chief struck.

It was nothing worse than bird-shot, but the dwarf aimed upward, and, with a roar of horrible agony, the giant staggered back, blinded!

A dull red glare now illuminated the room, and noticing it, Laurie exclaimed:

"Courage, boys, courage! See the light from the torches! Help is at hand!"

"Ay—help for these cut-throats!" returned the dwarf. "D'ye remember the half-dozen that cleared away?"

The words, necessarily loud-spoken—though in English—seemed to revive the ferocity of the blind giant, and with a savage cry to his followers, he came forward swinging his ax right and left.

There was no time for pistols—the brigands pressed on every side, and the end seemed very, very near, but the besieged fought like tigers—fought with a desperation born of despair.

Paulo, the blind giant, was the most dangerous of all—to both friend and foe, and, to escape his terrible strokes, Laurie cried:

"Jump into the midst of them. We can die there as well as here! Good-by!"

Striking right and left, with Spence and Harry at his back, Laurie fought his way from the chair near the window into the center of the brigands.

Here the three friends made a gallant fight—such as was possible for four to one—but it was only a question of a very few minutes, for all three were already wounded, when suddenly the floor was shaken by the fall of a heavy body.

It was Paulo. The dwarf had kept him off for a moment or two, until a favorable opportunity presented, and then diving between his legs, tossed him over his head. Then, like an undersized Vulcan, using only his brawny arms and bare hands, the dwarf scattered the dumfounded brigands right and left until he reached the three Americans, who, believing the giant dead, resumed the fight with renewed courage.

They were quickly undeceived, however, for within a minute the giant was on his feet, ax in hand, and at the same moment shouts and cries of a Paulo! a Paulo! mingled with pistol-shots and clashing of weapons, reached them from the roadway in front of the inn.

"Tis the brigands, as I said!" cried the dwarf.

CHAPTER X.

AT DEATH'S DOOR.

UP to the moment the cry of "a Paulo! a

Paulo!" reached the besieged, Laurie had fought coolly and desperately, watching every chance and making the most of every opportunity, hoping against hope that help would reach them, but now hope vanished, and springing forward like a madman, he cried:

"Come on! Don't give up till you're dead!"

"By St. David!" roared the dwarf, "I'll die with you!"

Laurie's aim was Paulo—next to Galileo, he wanted him dead before he, himself, died, and regardless of the cuts and thrusts aimed at him, the lieutenant fought his way to the giant, crying as he neared him:

"Beware, Paulo! Beware, your end is at hand!"

Warned by this, the giant struck out blindly, driving his followers away, and when Laurie reached him he was alone—an easy victim to a skillful swordsman, but it was not his fate to finish the brigand chief.

The latter, guided only by the lieutenant's voice—for his chivalrous nature made him give constant warning—aimed a swinging blow at Laurie, but it failed to reach the mark, because a strong hand threw Laurie aside, and as the giant reeled from the unopposed force of his own blow, a sword passed through his gullet.

"At 'em, my lads! At 'em!"

"Come, Laurie, jump in!"

When Laurie was thrown out of the way of the swinging ax, his head struck up against that of one of the brigands, and for a moment he saw stars, but the sound of two familiar voices recalled him from the clouds, and he saw Decatur, with Maxwell and a dozen of the Enterprise crew.

It was all over, however, and Decatur's invitation to "jump in" was worthless, for the brigands surrendered at once, and the seamen were not butchers.

Descending with Decatur to the bar, Laurie found the landlord, with a newly-engaged assistant serving wine to an excited and enraged crowd, eager to get at those who had offended—not to say attempted the murder of—their friends, the Americans.

Following close at the heels of Decatur and Laurie, were George and Harry, and the dwarf.

The last-named, still holding his long, bloody knife, marched to where the landlord was serving a customer, and grasping him by the arm, addressed the crowd, saying:

"This scoundrel is the worst of the band. His cellar is the grave of many a true man, woman and child! If you doubt me, search it!"

The dwarf's speech created a tremendous uproar, and, but for the sailors from the Enterprise, who appeared at this time and formed under Decatur's orders, the landlord would have been torn to pieces.

A few minutes later, while a number of people under the guidance of the dwarf were searching the cellar, a body of troops, guided by the innkeeper's wife arrived, and took charge of the prisoners.

This was a fortunate circumstance for the wretch who kept the inn, for immediately after, the searching party appeared with enough skulls and bones to hang twenty men, and it was all the troops could do to save him and the others—although they suffered ultimately.

Accompanied by the Americans, the officers in command of the troops made a visit to the room above.

They found it a very slaughter-house, and the officer could scarcely believe that four men had wrought all the destruction, and live to tell the tale. Six dead men lying on the floor, and one sitting in a chair, with a dozen prisoners down-stairs—all of the most desperate character—gave the Italian captain a rather high opinion of the Americans as fighters.

As they were leaving the scene of slaughter, one of the soldiers who carried torches to light the party uttered an exclamation that drew attention to the figure in the chair, and, on closer examination, it was found to be Galileo, the sergeant, who had been the first of the cut-throats to pay the debt of nature.

"Ah! A sergeant, too!" exclaimed the Italian captain. "It is impossible to say who may not be in league with the Carbonari. I, myself, might belong to it."

"Indeed you might!" returned Laurie, when Harry had interpreted the speech to him, and, turning to Decatur:

"Steve, I'm sick of this—let's get away! Besides, we're all pretty well cut up."

Decatur immediately left the room on hearing this, and, collecting his men, departed for Syracuse—the dwarf joining them at the last moment.

On the way back, Decatur told Laurie that, shortly after he had started, a Sicilian captain had come aboard the ship inquiring for him (Laurie), and, on being informed of where he had gone and under what circumstances, assured Decatur that his friends were in danger.

That was enough for the impetuous commander, and, throwing duty, discipline and everything else to the winds, he set off with a dozen men and six carriages in pursuit of his friends.

"We were misdirected twice, or we would have overhauled you long before; and just at the inn we met a parcel of thieving scoundrels who undertook to stop us—part of the same band you were dealing with, I imagine. At all events, they were shouting something like *Apolo! Apollo!*"

"The same gang, Steve," said Laurie, smiling faintly. "Anything from the com—"

Laurie had fainted from loss of blood, being wounded, as was afterward discovered, in no less than thirteen places.

As soon as he found Laurie needed immediate medical aid, Decatur drew a pistol, and, using Harry as an interpreter, informed the coachman that his friend was hurt and needed a doctor, and further, that his (the driver's) life depended on his quickness in finding one.

It is needless to say that this persuasive argument caused the driver to do his best to reach the nearest village where he knew a doctor could be found.

CHAPTER XI.

OFF FOR TRIPOLI.

A WEEK elapsed before Laurie felt anything like his former self, and that he did so at all was, under the mercy of God, owing to the dwarf, who saved him from the doctor, summoned to attend him.

Aside from the wounds he had received from swords and knives, Laurie had several times been struck in the head, and having bandaged the more serious cuts, the doctor decided that the bruises were the cause of Laurie's trouble.

"He is suffering from the shock produced by these blows," said the doctor, pointing to the bruises on Laurie's head, "but the science of phlebotomy will soon relieve and restore him."

The doctor had just made this cheerful announcement, and having bared Laurie's arm, desired Decatur to hold the basin for him, when the dwarf entered.

"Here, what are you doing?" he roared on seeing the lance, the bared arm, and the basin.

"I am about to bleed the patient and relieve—" began the doctor.

"And relieve him of his life!" interrupted the little giant, snatching the lance from the doctor, and the basin from Decatur. Then addressing the latter, he continued:

"This man (Laurie) has been using his body to shield others in the worst stabbing soiree I ever took part in, and must have bled like a stuck pig. Now, do you want to finish him?"

This was in English, but the doctor understood although he could not speak very well.

"But, sir-a, the science of phlebotomy teaches—" began the doctor.

"Robbery and murder!" interrupted the dwarf, flinging a heavy purse on the table, and drawing the long knife:

"I'll draw from you a pint for every drop from him (Laurie)! Take your choice—do as I say and be paid, or attempt to do as you propose, and be punctured!"

Upon the dwarf explained to Decatur that he was a physician, and as the doctor preferred pay to puncture, he decided to follow the dwarf's directions.

The dwarf—who gave his name as Thomas ap. Jones, his birthplace as Wales, and his profession that of a surgeon—proved a very good doctor, and had Laurie on his feet at the end of a week.

Jones, himself, submitted his wounds to the doctor, while George and Harry were cared for by the surgeon of the *Enterprise*.

The affair naturally created considerable comment on the character and quality of Americans as fighters, and certainly did not lessen them in the estimation of friends or enemies.

The commodore, meantime, had been flying about, making the *Constitution* travel in lively style, visiting Tunis to quiet the Bey, thence to Malta, back again to Syracuse, again to Malta and Tunis, then to Naples to borrow gunboats and bomb vessels (in which he succeeded), and thence to Messina, with an order from the King of the Two Sicilies for the vessels, with which he returned to Syracuse.

This was all done—including much important negotiation, and the introduction of the Bey of

Tunis—before the 1st day of June, 1804—the *Constitution* arriving at Syracuse on (the then undreamt of) Decoration Day, and it required a man of his untiring, tremendous energy to do it.

The commodore was not through, however, for on his arrival he ordered Decatur to prepare to sail next day, and leaving the Sicilian vessels to be altered and equipped, started next morning for Tripoli, to treat for the liberation of the officers and crew of the *Philadelphia*.

The Bashaw was in no humor to deal with, and sending supplies to Captain Bainbridge and his people, the commodore proceeded to Tunis, being advised that the ruler of that state needed looking after, and Preble's appearance, with the *Enterprise* and *Argus* in company, having produced the desired effect, the commodore, after transacting a great deal of business, returned to Syracuse, and five days later (July 26, 1804) set sail, with all the force he could collect, for Tripoli.

All this is simply to show the nervous, energetic temperament of Preble (and no ship of the same size was ever more actively employed than the *Constitution*), and to excuse, if necessary, his only fault—temper.

On the 25th of July, 1804, Commodore Preble found himself before Tripoli with one frigate, three brigs, two bomb vessels and six gunboats—able to bear on the castle, batteries, etc., at once, twenty-eight heavy and twenty light guns, while the Bashaw's batteries, behind solid masonry, mounted 118 guns—most of them heavy—and as for troops, he had about 25,000 at his command.

Afloat, the Bashaw had nineteen gunboats, a brig, two schooners and two large galleys.

This will give the reader some idea of the odds against Commodore Preble, and his reason for consenting to the desperate enterprise afterward set afoot.

Immediately on the arrival of the American vessels, the wind began to blow fresh from the northward, and the whole squadron was compelled to weigh and claw off-shore. At one time it blew so violently as to take the *Constitution's* reefed canvas out of the bolt-ropes, and, had not the wind hauled and made the coast a weather shore, there would have been little hope for the miserable craft obtained from Sicily.

Owing to these disadvantages, it was August 3d before Commodore Preble got again in front of Tripoli, and, during the interim, the Bashaw had sent two divisions of gunboats outside of a line of rocks that stretches from the little entrance of the harbor, quite near the galley mole, for a mile diagonally to seaward.

All this reef was within complete protection of the fire of the batteries.

Preble did not anchor, but, laying his own ship's head about a league off-shore, signaled for everything to pass within hail, and as each vessel passed, issued his orders.

The *Constitution* then wore round and stood in toward the town, leading the whole squadron. Half an hour later the commodore gave the signal to engage, everything advanced, the gunboats covered by the light cruisers, and the bomb vessels began to throw shells. The batteries replied, and then the smaller craft on both sides joined in.

Decatur and Somers, who had charge of the American gunboats, were ordered to attack the division of the enemy lying near the main entrance to the harbor.

The Tripolitan division consisted of six large gunboats, while Decatur's division consisted of three light gunboats—small boats of about twenty-five tons, never intended to cope with such heavy craft as was now opposed to them.

Somers's division of three boats was of the same caliber, but even these failed to support Decatur, being too far leeward to fetch the main entrance, except one, and that only replaced one of Decatur, which, failing to get to windward, joined Somers and young Bainbridge in attacking those nearest.

Seeing the others would be unable to join him, Decatur pushed on with his three gunboats—much to the surprise of the Tripolitans, who expected nothing closer than mile-range cannonading; but they were quickly undeceived, and the six gunboats backed by the forts and shore batteries were boarded by three of the miserable craft borrowed from Naples.

Each of the American boats captured the boat it engaged—or, rather, the one boarded, for all were engaged—and the others, being driven in behind the rocks, retreated with their prizes.

It was most gallant, daring work, and the prizes were captured only after a fierce, bloody conflict, the result being that Decatur for the

second time proved that, hand to hand, the Christian was the better man.

Laurie and Spence, acting under Decatur, had, with their young commander, performed prodigies, as did Somers and (young) Bainbridge, although the latter were not successful in capturing any of the enemy's craft.

It had been a desperate and remarkable conflict, and, while it was going on, the *Constitution* stood in, deliberately shortening sail, as if entering a friendly port, and kept up a constant fire until Decatur was ready to withdraw, when the commodore hauled off, and rendezvoused with all his force beyond range of shot.

The commodore had been so actively engaged that he had not observed all the difficulties with which Decatur had to contend, nor the supremely gallant manner in which he had overcome them. Others, however, had, and Decatur was the center of observation when he appeared on the quarter-deck of *Old Ironsides* to report.

The young commander was still in fighting gear, armed to the teeth, his face blackened with powder, and his breast covered with blood that had flowed from a wound received during the taking—with his own hand, it might almost be said—of one of the prizes.

Approaching in a quiet way, Decatur announced:

"Well, commodore, I have brought you out three of the gunboats."

The commodore acknowledged this information of the result of the speaker's gallant work by seizing him with both hands by the collar, and shaking him violently, as one would an offending boy, crying bitterly:

"Ay, sir, why did you not bring me more?"

This on the quarter-deck of a man-of-war, and to a man who had shortly before been performing prodigies of courage and skill in the face of tremendous odds!

Decatur's hand flew to the dirk in his bosom, while his eyes blazed, but the moment the commodore ceased speaking, he had turned and disappeared in his own cabin, and moreover the influence of rank in military professions is tremendous.

It was a dangerous moment, however, for Decatur ordered his boat, and was about to quit the ship, but the other commanders crowded around, and entreated him to be calm, and above all not to leave the *Constitution*.

Somers, Stewart and Laurie—all of Decatur's old messmates surrounded him, and he was still in suspense, when a message came:

"Commodore Preble wishes to see Captain Decatur below!"

This, of course, was nothing less than an order, and after a momentary hesitation, Decatur went below, the expression of his face, and the character of the two men, now about to come together, causing much uneasiness.

In a few minutes this uneasy feeling—among the crew as well as officers—grew so great that Somers, making a pretext of desiring to have the boy Harry with him, descended to the cabin. He found the commodore and Decatur sitting within a few feet of each other, both silent, and both in tears!

Somers slipped back on deck unnoticed, and shortly afterward the commodore and Decatur came up, chatting about the day's work.

CHAPTER XII.

A DESPERATE VENTURE.

WARNED by the first day's experience, the Tripolitan gunboats did not venture outside the reef, and finally got so shy that they would retire as soon as the American boats got within musket-range.

This prevented any close work for several days, during which Captain Chauncey arrived with the *John Adams* and information that another squadron was on its way to join him.

The Bashaw was now more inclined to treat, and dropped from a thousand dollars a man, ransom, and the customary tribute, to five hundred dollars a man and no tribute.

While the negotiations which this offer produced were in progress, the commodore took advantage of the informal truce to order Decatur to reconnoiter as close as was prudent.

This was a rather discretionary order to give a man who delighted in deeds of the wildest daring, and the feeling through the squadron is best expressed in Laurie's comment:

"Prudent! The commodore must have forgotten whom he was talking to. Why, if Steve takes the notion now, he's liable to visit the Bashaw himself."

"Do I have a chance to accompany you?" asked Spence.

"Yes; and do you not think it would be a good opportunity to make use of your friend Harry's knowledge of the harbor?"

Laurie said this very innocently, but George saw the point, and, bidding his superior attend to his own business, demanded what preparations he should make.

"None, my dear boy, none," replied Laurie, smilingly. "You will have charge of Steve's boat, and you know he will attend to that."

"Come! don't be sulky—let's sit down and have a chat about that boy."

"Do you know I've half a notion to take him in my boat?" continued Laurie, who, having teased his comrade out of his usual dignified demeanor, now wished to soothe him.

"Do, Laurie!" eagerly exclaimed Spence. "There's no telling what may happen. Glory always goes with Decatur, and Harry may have a chance to become something."

"Very well; I'll do it—for his sister's sake," laughed Laurie, leaving the cabin to escape his friend's wrath.

And so it happened that Harry was in the stern sheets of one of the two boats that, having escaped detection, lay at midnight for an hour under the walls of the Bashaw's castle—Fort English.

Fortune had favored them going in—the night was pitch dark, and if noticed at all, they had been mistaken for Tripolitans. The very boldness with which the boats advanced would suggest this, and so they had passed unchallenged.

Returning, however, they were hailed in passing a brig near the entrance. Gunboats, galleys, schooners and brigs lay all about, and many directly in their path. None of the officers understood the language in which they were hailed, the sky was beginning to light up, detection seemed imminent, and escape next to impossible.

The hail was quickly repeated in threatening tones, and Decatur was about to chance a volley by ordering the men to give way, when Harry, who had asked Laurie's instructions, replied that they were out "to reconnoiter the enemy."

This satisfied the officer in charge of the brig, who apparently only wished to exercise a newly acquired authority, and the answer being in good Arabic, he allowed the boats to pass.

Delay for five minutes would have been very dangerous, for the boats were barely clear of the rocks when the moon struggled out from the clouds, that had up to that time rendered the night so dark.

There had been much flashing of lights, and some excitement observed aboard the outermost Tripolitan craft during Decatur's absence, and this caused so much uneasiness that it reached the commodore, and as the boats passed the Constitution, Preble desired the commanders to come aboard at once.

"Don't forget Harry," whispered Spence, as the captain and first lieutenant left the boats.

"Why, this boy seems to be your guardian angel!" smilingly exclaimed the commodore, when Decatur had related his stirring story, adding:

"What shall I do for him, gentlemen?"

He was in an unwontedly good humor over the successful entrance and departure of the party, and gladly assented to the prompt proposition:

"You might give him an acting order as midshipman, commodore."

The acting order was duly made out and received by Harry Lee next day, and Spence, who was present, remarking the curious smile with which the boy scanned it, asked:

"Why that smile, Harry?"

"No particular reason—the name as much as anything else."

He was an odd kind of a boy, not given to talking of the affairs of others, and never of his own, unless questioned—and Gentleman George was not the one to ask many questions, so the matter was dropped.

A gale springing up from the northward, the commodore was compelled to abandon his intention of renewing the attack on the day succeeding the reconnoitering, the squadron being obliged to quit its anchors.

Having obtained an offing the squadron, while lying to, fell in with supplies from Malta, and to his surprise and disgust, the commodore learned that no intelligence had been received of the expected reinforcement.

This led Preble to decide to continue his operations with his own limited means, and, probably to adopt the desperate expedient, to which we will now proceed, without relating the two days' fighting immediately preceding it.

The ketch Intrepid, now not inaptly re-named the Infernal, was one of the vessels that arrived with supplies from Malta, and on the night following the fourth and last attack of that year on Tripoli, Somers appeared before the commodore with a proposition to take this vessel into the harbor, fitted as a fire-ship and infernal, and explode it among the very center of the vessels of the Turk!

The Intrepid had been captured by Decatur, and used by him in one of the most brilliant exploits of naval warfare, and Somers (between whom and Decatur there existed a singular professional competition—though it was never allowed to cool their personal friendships) now proposed to terminate her career in another exploit of a most desperate and daring character.

There is little doubt that, since Decatur's reconnoitering party, the commodore had some such idea himself, and agreeing to the proposition, he gave Somers orders to prepare at once for the execution of it.

Somers called in Decatur, Laurie and Stewart, whose advice and assistance he had in the preparation of the vessel for the desperate service in which she was to be engaged, for these gallant young men felt a common sympathy in his daring, and an equal in his anticipated triumph.

A small apartment was planked up in the broadest part of the Infernal, and into this one hundred barrels of gunpowder was emptied. A train was led aft to a cabin window, and another to the fore-peak. Port fires, to burn a certain number of minutes, were placed at the ends of the trains, and a pile of fine wood abaft the magazine.

Two hundred and fifty shells, with prepared fuses, were placed around the mast directly over the magazine, and the deck literally covered with all sorts of missiles.

Somers made his offer on the night of Sept. 3d, and on the evening of the 4th, he called for volunteers to man one of the two boats that accompanied him.

This was a very fast four-oared boat, and he needed only four men, but every man on board the Nautilus volunteered, so their commander was compelled to pick them—first pointing out the desperate character of the service.

The favored four gave three cheers in reply, and each asked separately for the privilege of applying the match, and having verbally made their wills, awaited the arrival of the other boat, which was a six-oared cutter furnished by the Constitution, and commanded by Lieutenant Wadsworth. This boat joined the Infernal about dusk, but when the boats' crews were mustered, it was found that Lieutenant Israel, who had been refused permission to be of the party, had managed to get out of the frigate, and being aboard, Somers allowed him to remain—making the unfortunate thirteen.

Lieutenant Reed of the Nautilus was the last to leave the ketch. When he went over the side communication with the world ceased.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END OF THE INFERNAL.

AMONG the last to leave Somers was Decatur and Stewart, with whom he had commenced his naval career.

All three knew the hazardous character of the enterprise, and the two who were to remain behind, felt a deep interest in the fate of him who was to go in.

Somers was grave, and without any affectation of levity or indifference, but quiet and tranquil as usual.

After some conversation, he took a ring from his finger, and breaking it into three pieces, gave each of his friends one, retaining the third himself.

Of all the desperate service undertaken by that devoted squadron—and none ever attempted the number of daring deeds it performed while before Tripoli—none was entered on with so many forebodings of the fatal consequences to those concerned in it. While all were tranquil and even cheerful, every man acted—in shaking hands, and expressing their feelings to their friends and comrades—as if assured they would never return.

The Infernal lifted her anchor about nine that night, which was not particularly dark. The stars were visible, but there was a haze on the water that rendered objects uncertain, and it was therefore favorable, as while the rocks could be seen, the ketch was not likely to be discovered from the shore.

The Argus, Vixen, Nautilus and Siren followed the ketch to within a short distance of the rocks, to attack the gunboats and galleys,

should they attempt to follow the party out on their retreat.

The Siren had kept more in the offing than the others, and every eye in the brig was riveted in silent suspense on the quarter in which the ketch had disappeared from view.

Soon firing was heard, though the reports were neither rapid nor numerous. At this moment, near ten o'clock, Lieutenant Carroll, standing with Stewart at the gangway of the Siren, exclaimed:

"Look! See the light!"

It was like the light of a lantern being carried rapidly along a vessel's deck, and was in the quarter where the Infernal was known to be, near the batteries.

Half a minute after, the whole firmament was lighted up with a fiery glow, a burning mast, with its sails, was seen in the air, then came the awful explosion, and a darkness like that of doom succeeded. It was all over in less than a minute—the flame, the reeling of ships, the quaking of towers, and bursting of shells.

The firing ceased, and from that instant Tripoli passed the night in a stillness as profound as that in which the heroes of the Infernal have lain from that fatal hour to this.

The Nautilus showed lights, hoping to guide the retreating boats, but none came. No one ever returned to tell how the ill-fated Infernal was lost.

All night a moaning gun was heard from the Constitution, a fitting knell for such a disaster, but in vain, and the Argus, Vixen and Nautilus, which hovered near the rocks until sunrise, could discover nothing to throw light on the manner in which the ketch was lost.

Three gunboats that had been anchored near the pass the previous night had entirely disappeared, and two or three more were hauled ashore, as if shattered.

Thus perished Richard Somers, one of the "bravest of the brave," and how he and his companions died and the damage actually done by the explosion still remains a secret.

The sad affair cast a gloom over the squadron, and two days after, the weather beginning to assume a threatening aspect, the commodore took the guns, mortars, shot and shells out of the Neapolitan craft and prizes and sent the vessels themselves to Syracuse—thus ending the attacking system for the year.

The Enterprise was one of the four vessels detailed to conduct these vessels into port, and in her sailed Decatur and his friends, accompanied by Stewart in the Siren.

Preble, with the Constitution, Argus and Vixen, continued the blockade a few days longer, and then the long-expected Commodore Barron in the President, a 44 gun frigate, with the Constellation, 38, arrived.

There being a senior officer present, Preble immediately sailed for Malta, where he relinquished command of the Constitution and then proceeded to Syracuse.

Finding Decatur here, he ordered him to Malta to take charge of his own frigate, feeling deeply gratified in being able to bestow so fine a ship on an officer who had so brilliantly distinguished himself.

The hot-tempered commodore never again appeared in the Mediterranean, but while there he had worked wonders with his small force. Previous to Preble's quitting his command, the Bashaw was willing to relinquish all claim to tribute forever.

Tunis submitted to a similar provision the same year, and Algiers had done so previously. This was more than all Christendom combined had been able to accomplish in nearly three hundred years!

It was not until the spring of 1805, however, that Yusef (the Bashaw), signed the treaty which has ever since—with one slight exception—been adhered to, and, the Bashaw still holding out, General Eaton, the American Consul for the Barbary States, was dispatched to Upper Egypt where Hamet, the elder brother of Yusef and deposed sovereign of Tripoli, was commanding an army of Mamelukes against the Turks to propose an alliance against Tripoli.

This was a long, weary journey, and before the general accomplished his purpose many interesting events took place among the waiting squadron.

CHAPTER XIV.

HARRY AND THE COMMODORE.

AS Commodore Preble left the cabin of the Enterprise, and came on deck with Decatur, after ordering the latter to take command of the Constitution, his glance fell upon Harry Lee, and although full of business—settling his accounts, etc.—he remembered the circum-

stances under which the lad had entered the service, and turning to his companion, asked, interestedly:

"How does the young midshipman progress?"
 "There is no fault to find. He is very quiet and attentive, and will undoubtedly get along," replied Decatur.

"Humph. No near relatives, except the sister, I believe?"

"I hardly know. Lee!"

Harry, who was standing close by, and had probably guessed he was the subject of conversation, stepped forward, and Decatur continued:

"Commodore Preble is interested in your career, and wishes to know something of your family connections."

As mentioned in another chapter, Harry was not talkative. When he spoke, he usually had something to say worth hearing, and this time his words came like a bomb-shell. Looking straight at the captain, he calmly replied:

"I thank the commodore for his interest, but as to my family connections, he probably knows as much, if not more, than I do, in that regard—Mrs. Preble certainly does!"

"Eh? What's that?" demanded the commodore, staring hard at Harry.

"Mrs. Preble and my mother were first cousins, so she probably—" began the boy, but the commodore, grasping him by the arm, desired Decatur to follow them to the cabin.

"Now," he said, planting himself in front of Harry, "what was your mother's name, and where was she born, and how d'ye know she was related to my wife?"

"Deering was my mother's name. She was born in Massachusetts while Mrs. Preble was born in Maine. As for how I know of the relationship between them—I know only as other people know: through hearing it mentioned in the family, and my uncle's desire that I should change my name when I changed my country, because he particularly disliked my slight relationship to the Prebles."

Harry delivered this long speech calmly and without a break, while the commodore and captain listened in amazement.

"Then Lee is not your real name?" demanded the commodore.

"No, sir. Oxnard was my father's name."

"By Heaven, 'tis true!—I've heard of it before!" exclaimed Preble, taking Harry's hand, but the next instant dropped it and asked very sternly:

"Why was I not informed of this at once?"

"Because I did not know all of it until my sister was leaving, and— Well, anyhow, I did not propose to force myself upon you."

The two seniors exchanged glances, and with a grim smile, the commodore said:

"You were lucky not to have reached your destination, for that spirit savors too much of the Revolution to suit England."

"But come," he continued, "now that you are exposed, we must do something for you. I am going back, as you probably know, but Captain Decatur will look after you until you return. Anything you require, he will be authorized to give you."

"I must leave at once, as I have so much to do that you will probably be home as soon as I can."

Within an hour, Preble had started in the Argus for the half-dozen or more ports at which he had business to transact, leaving with the encouraging declaration, that Harry's interest should be pushed as fast as there was excuse for it—but he never saw his young relative again.

There was little to be done during the absence of General Eaton on his thousand-mile trip across the Desert of Barca, and Harry's story created no little interest among his friends and comrades—for before leaving the ship, the commodore made it pretty well known that the midshipman was a relative, and much admiration was expressed at his independence in refraining from appealing to the influence of one so powerful as Preble.

He accordingly made one of the party which Decatur took with him from the Enterprise to the Constitution.

The latter vessel was ordered off to Tripoli to assist in the blockade, where she remained cruising on and off until spring.

This was anything but lively work, for the Turk was becoming an exceedingly shy creature, and Decatur did everything except join in several stolen visits ashore.

One of these visits was the outcome of a conversation in the surgeon's quarters, wherein Gentleman George complained bitterly of their lack of work, and, referring to Laurie, who was present, continued:

"If he had not grown so stiff since becoming first officer, we would not be growing rusty for want of exercise."

Laurie laughingly denied the stiffness, and the dwarf, Jones, who had joined the ship at Malta at the solicitation of Decatur—medical men being most difficult to obtain—suggested a trip ashore.

"No, no," said Laurie, "that would do well enough for midshipmen, but it will not do now."

"See!" cried Spence, "'tis as I said—he's too stiff for anything outside the strict lines of duty."

"If it keeps on, you'll snap in two some day. Laurie."

The dwarf, who was not accustomed to being cooped up, assured the others that the visit could be made in perfect safety under his convoy, as he was as well known and respected among the Tripolitan pirates as he had been until recently among the Italian bandits.

The Constitution was then lying at anchor some distance below the city, nearly where Decatur and Laurie had once landed, and the latter was finally teased into saying he would try arrange matters with the captain.

That evening Laurie suggested to Decatur that as "the boys were getting rusty," it would not be a bad idea to send a few ashore—as a reconnoitering party, for lack of a better name—at the same time repeating the dwarf's assurance of safety.

At first Decatur would not listen to the suggestion.

"Suppose a gale should spring up, and it's the most likely thing to happen on this infernal coast—and we should be compelled to claw off shore?"

"Or, suppose they are detected and captured?"

Laurie repeated the dwarf's words in reply to his captain's objections, and added that the party really might obtain some information of value, as two of them spoke Arabic, French and Italian.

Decatur at length yielded a reluctant consent, and that night Spence and Harry, under the dwarf's escort, started for Tripoli.

"Be back at this spot, at this time, forty-eight hours hence, or I'll come after you with Morris, and a file of marines," warned Laurie, as he returned with the boat from which the others had disembarked.

This, although said jestingly, was actually a time limit, but circumstances would have prevented Laurie from fulfilling his threat—even if it was made in earnest.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN TRIPOLI—A FIGHT.

THE party reached the city in safety, and having first procured some more suitable clothing, spent the night knocking around the wine-shops among the soldiers and sailors.

Dressed in a half-military uniform, and wearing sabers, the three went from place to place, without attracting any particular attention, and just at daylight learned that the Bashaw was aware of General Eaton's mission in visiting the deposed sovereign, and, what was still more important, that the latter had eagerly embraced the offer of an alliance against Tripoli, and had furnished the general a fine body of troops.

This important information was gathered from the conversation of several half-drunken Turkish officers, who, a few minutes later, began to discuss the chances of their being included in the army with which the Bashaw was preparing to intercept General Eaton at Derne!

"We have heard something of great importance," whispered the dwarf. "Come outside, and I will tell you."

"This is of greatest importance," said Spence, after hearing what Harry and the dwarf had to tell, and glancing at the sky, continued:

"There's a storm brewing—it's beginning to blow already—and the ship will be lifting anchor within an hour or two at the furthest, so we must get right back."

Harry and the dwarf—or Tom Jones, as he bade them call him—saw that George was right, and, although it robbed them of their holiday, started off at once.

At the next crossing they halted to look at a body of unfortunate slaves being conducted to some galleys lying near Fort English.

It was now broad day, and, as the first file passed, Harry uttered an exclamation that came near causing serious trouble.

"My uncle!" he cried, pointing to a man on the end of the line.

The officer in charge, as well as the captive, turned on hearing the words, and the former, rendered suspicious by the semi-Turkish uniform and English-spoken words, halted and demanded who they were.

Luckily, Harry's uncle had not recognized him, owing to the dress he wore, and the dwarf, seldom taken by surprise, promptly replied that they were Turkish officers, just arrived from Derne.

The officer looked suspicious, he was only half satisfied, but the slaves were intended to man the galleys, and the weather had grown very threatening in the last few minutes; so, vailing his suspicions, that the strangers might not become alarmed, he gave the orders to march.

"That fellow means mischief—he'll have a file of soldiers after us in no time—we must get away at once, or—"

Jones was still speaking—in English, of course—when Spence was nearly knocked down by a violent push from one of the officers they had heard talking in the wine-shop.

The push was plainly intentional, the fellow having stealthily crept up and joining in the laughter with which his companions, who were standing some fifty yards away, greeted his effort to throw Spence.

George's dandified appearance had suggested the idea of tossing him into the dirty street as being an excellent joke, but the slender, graceful form of the young lieutenant was very deceptive.

He was one bundle of muscles—hard as steel and active as a cat, and before his assailant knew what had struck him he was stretched on the ground by a smashing blow on the neck.

Unfortunately, as George struck out, he said:

"There, you insolent dog, that will teach you manners!"

Possibly it did, but it also taught him that the speaker was not a Turk, and he cried out to his comrades, who came running to his assistance to "seize the spies."

In a moment both parties were engaged, for the route of the three Americans was now blockaded by the six Tripolitans, and for a few minutes the fighting was fast and furious—necessarily so on the American side, since more soldiers were liable to arrive at any moment.

To the astonishment of his friends, Harry proved more expert than either with the saber, though the great strength of the dwarf rendered him the most formidable opponent, in the hurricane style of fighting that met the Tripolitans' attack.

"Look out—the guard is coming!" warned Harry, as after the lapse of two or three minutes, his man went down with a split skull.

At the same moment, Jones almost cut off his opponent's head, while George—on the sword-exercise principle—ran his man through.

Three down in three minutes would have staggered most men. Not so the Tripolitans, and seeing his friends would be delayed until the guard arrived, Jones cried in Arabic—apparently to some one approaching from behind the Tripolitans:

"Help! Friends, help!"

The ruse was successful. The Tripolitans turned to look, and as they did, the Americans dashed by them, each delivering a cut across the legs in passing.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUT OF THE FRYINGPAN.

BEFORE shouting to his imaginary friends for assistance, the dwarf said, in English:

"When I shout, make a dash, and each try to hamstring his man."

The first part of the programme was carried out all right, but whether the men were hamstrung or not, there was no pursuit until the guard arrived, and by the time the situation was explained, the Americans had gained the road leading out of the city.

"They will be after us as soon as they hear who we are," said the dwarf, as they passed out of the city. "We must hurry."

"I can't go any faster," groaned Harry.

"Eh? Hurt?" cried Spence, in alarm, as he and Jones came to a stop on each side of the boy.

It was well they did, for Harry had received the worst wound of all, and had been bleeding for some time. He now fainted, and was caught by Spence.

"Give him to me—we have no time to attend to him now," growled the dwarf, and taking Harry in his powerful arms, set off again at a trot.

"He's been leaving a regular trail of blood,

"I'm afraid—both for his sake and ours," said Jones as he trotted along, "but, if we can reach a little house along here we'll be safe."

"Along here" was about two miles outside of the city, and the little house was reached in safety—and they hoped, unnoticed.

The dwarf had done the fishing—smuggling—piratical owner some service in the past, and when the situation was explained, he promised to befriend them.

"Can we trust him?" asked Spence, as he assisted in binding Harry's wound, which was in the side, and more dangerous than the half-dozen cuts received by himself and the dwarf.

"Trust him? I saved his leg from amputation by a fool two years ago—you see he limps a little and can no longer ride—but I saved the leg. He is a pure Arab, and an Arab never forgets a service."

The man referred to, who was limping up and down the roadway in front of the open door, now came nearer, and spoke to Jones, who immediately picked up Harry, saying:

"They are coming! We must get up to the loft."

The loft, which was reached by a ladder, and so low-ceilinged that even the dwarf was forced to bend over, was used to store fishing-tackle, sails, oars, guns, goods—smuggled and stolen, and so choked up, that as a hiding-place it offered many advantages for one.

"But for three?" questioned Spence.

"Never mind—they haven't come up here yet," returned the dwarf, as he drew up the ladder.

As soon as the ladder was stowed away, the dwarf crept to the one little window in the loft, and had barely reached it when the thunder of horse-hoofs was heard approaching, and in a few minutes stopped at the door.

For just one minute the fugitives in the loft were in suspense, and then the horsemen thundered away.

"Gone to find us up among the hills," chuckled the dwarf, turning from the window.

"What now?" asked George.

"Keep quiet till we hear from below."

Full five minutes elapsed before the Arab's voice was heard at the hatchway, and in response Jones put down the ladder.

"Go ahead," he said to Spence, and followed himself with Harry.

A short and earnest conversation followed between Jones and the Arab, which the former explained to George.

The false information given by the Arab would gain the fugitives two hours at most. Then the party would return and search the house, and it would cost him his life if they were discovered—as they would be without doubt. He, therefore, proposed to take them off in his boat.

"But it's blowing half a gale and increasing every minute," protested George.

"If it was blowing a hurricane we must go—it's our only chance," returned Jones. "You look after him (Harry), and we'll attend to the boat."

Scarcely had the dwarf and the Arab begun to get the boat ready, when Harry began to recover, and long before the boat was ready, was up on his feet, though still very weak.

The boat, which was something like an English cutter, but smaller and lighter, was ready in an hour, and then amid a tremendous gale, the little party began a voyage which might appall the stoutest heart.

There was no hope of doing anything but scud before the blast, and this they did hour after hour, expecting every moment to be engulfed by the mountainous seas that swept everything from the deck, save the Arab and Jones at the wheel, and George, clinging to a life-line ready with an ax to clear away the wreckage of the mast, which threatened to go at any moment.

Suddenly the wind changed, and now the boat was swept back toward the land, and as it continued the Arab began to grow alarmed, for they were rapidly nearing the worst part of the coast, and still holding the ax, George struggled forward to the bow to watch for the dreaded shore.

Six hours out and nearly six hours in, and all exhausted by the terrible storm, and then from George forward came that awful, terror-striking cry to all seamen:

"Breakers ahead! Breakers ahead!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

It was about ten o'clock at night when the little boat which had been for twelve hours driving before the storm, now approached the coast, driving straight to destruction.

As they drew near the rock-bound coast, there shone through the blackness a distant beam like a tiny star, and an instant later, as a flash of lightning revealed to George the true conformation of the coast, he uttered a joyful cry.

Struggling aft to the wheel, he bade the dwarf take the Arab forward, and stand ready to drop anchor.

"Don't stop to argue! Do as I say—I know the place!" cried George, pushing aside the helmsman.

On and on flew the boat, and, as the light grew larger, George grew more confident that it was the signal light in the window of a cabin, at the mouth of the lagoon where he had landed over a year before to rescue Laurie and Decatur.

The thunder of the breakers lifted itself above that of the heavens, as George yelled the order:

"Stand by to let go!"

A great surge of the sea lifted the boat high in the air, between two great walls of seething foam.

It was touch and go, and God's grace for the rest!

The signal flame was now a steady glow, and George threw his weight on the spokes, sending the wheel over till the blocks grated!

Then, as the boat's head flew round, he yelled:

"Let go!"

Splash! went the anchor, followed by the rattle of the chain, and then, as the boat felt the snub of the biting iron, she swung at her mooring in water comparatively smooth, except for the heavy swell hove in from the sea without the little lagoon.

It had been a very close shave—the slightest variation would have dashed them upon the rocks, and all were so excited that, notwithstanding their exhausted condition, sleep was out of the question.

The Arab set about making coffee, and, while he was doing it, Jones gave each of the drenched, half-drowned party, a much needed dose of brandy.

The night was spent in talking, and laying plans for their future movements—plans which were set aside at daybreak next morning.

During the night, the gale abated steadily, until at daybreak nothing was left of it except a strong breeze, and a moderately heavy sea.

With the first streaks of dawn, George was on deck, and before the sun had fairly risen, he had made out the Constitution, at anchor, about two miles distant.

The joyful discovery was quickly shared by the others, the anchor was lifted, sail set, and, with the aid of a couple of sweeps, the boat was got out of the lagoon.

It was the first lieutenant's watch on board the Constitution, and he was astonished at the bold manner in which the little boat, with its four piratical-looking occupants, approached the frigate, but as it drew nearer he discovered the identity of three with his glass and received them with open arms.

Scarcely noticing Laurie's warm welcome, George briefly related what they had learned in Tripoli, and the first officer immediately aroused the captain, to whom he repeated it.

"Get under way as soon as possible!" exclaimed Decatur.

And, under every inch of canvas she could spread, the Constitution started for Malta.

It was a quick and uneventful voyage, during which the adventures of Spence and his companions became public property, which, needless to say, did not lessen them in the esteem of their comrades.

Arriving at Malta, Decatur found Commodore Rodgers in command of the squadron, who, immediately upon hearing his story, set sail for Derne to coöperate with General Eaton against the Bashaw's principal eastern sea-port—the only place on foreign soil over which the American flag ever floated.

Like all other commodores, Rodgers fell in love with the Constitution. Decatur was transferred to the Congress, and, being now a full-fledged captain—not a lieutenant-commander—had no longer the rank which gave opportunity for the daring acts which previously distinguished him, and he was compelled to rest on his laurels in the closing scene of the war against Tripoli.

Laurie and Spence, however, as well as Midshipman Lee, had opportunities at Derne, which they did not neglect.

Hamet had eagerly accepted the overtures of General Eaton and furnished him with a fine body of Arab cavalry and some Greek soldiers.

With this force the general set out from Alexandria on the 5th of March, 1805, and, after

traversing the Desert of Barca for one thousand miles, arrived before Derne on the 25th of April.

The Bashaw was sending a large force, the town was prepared for resistance, and General Eaton found it would be necessary to carry it by storm.

At this fortunate moment a division of the American fleet arrived in the harbor, and operations were at once begun.

CHAPTER XIX.

"I MUST QUIT THE SERVICE."

GENERAL EATON'S assaulting column consisted of Arab cavalry, Greek infantry, Tripolitan rebels, and American sailors serving on land.

Before or since, the American flag never waved over so motley an assemblage. Yet the town was most gallantly carried.

Cannonading was begun by the ships in the early morning, and, while this was going on, the assaulting column was formed, while boats from the various vessels of the squadron prepared to act with them.

Laurie commanded a division of boats, armed with howitzers, and Spence commanded one under him—Harry Lee being the latter's coxswain.

When the signal was given, the boats dashed forward under a heavy fire from the ships, and attacked the enemy's light craft which was lying close inshore.

Accustomed to fighting in Decatur's stop-at-nothing style, Laurie's method of going right ahead, and carrying whatever came in his way, was so amazingly simple and successful, that, long before the town was carried, both he and George had been noted for promotion.

Returning to the squadron, after the town had been stormed, Spence boarded and manned a deserted gunboat, and found several slaves confined in the hold.

When these unfortunates were released and brought on deck, one of them attracted George's attention by his sullen, savage demeanor, while his companions were full of joy over their escape from slavery, and a second look convinced him that it was Harry's uncle.

Harry had been sent below to see if there was anything of value in the cabin, and on making the discovery above noted, George said:

"Mr. Lee, go below to the cabin—you will find somebody there who will be glad to see you."

The late slave looked up in dull surprise, for a moment, and then, without comment, went below.

At the end of a half-hour, the reunited uncle and nephew made their appearance on deck, and as they approached, George was surprised to see that, of the two, the elder appeared most pleased at the meeting.

There was no time to inquire into the reason. Derne being taken, all haste must be made back to Tripoli, so having made Mr. Lee as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, George was compelled to leave him to the care of Harry, while he, himself, attended to his duty.

Mr. Lee had proved a very intractable captive, and consequently, had been treated with great brutality, and, although still unsubdued, was suffering terribly from the effects of this ill-treatment when rescued.

The dwarf—or, to give him his proper title, Assistant-Surgeon Jones—found, on examining him, that nothing but the greatest care and freedom from worry and excitement of every kind, would preserve Mr. Lee's life for any length of time.

The free use of the lash and the bastinado, together with lack of proper nourishment at all times, and starvation occasionally, had broken his constitution, and the surgeon so informed Harry, to whom he had become greatly attached.

Bad as this was, it was not the cause of the dejection which the midshipman plainly exhibited before reaching Tripoli.

Harry had been relieved from duty, and spent much of his time with his uncle, so that it was not until the squadron anchored opposite the Bashaw's palace that George had an opportunity of asking the cause of his friend's trouble.

That evening, when Mr. Lee had fallen asleep, Harry came up for a breath of air, and met George, who asked:

"What's wrong with you, Harry?"

"I must quit the service," was the mournful reply.

"Quit the service! What do you mean?"

"My uncle will not allow me to remain—I will not listen to a word of argument about the matter, and opposition to his wishes will simply kill him. Moreover, I promised my fa-

ther to obey my uncle, and now I must comply with his wishes."

Astonished and indignant, George asked if there was no hope of changing Mr. Lee's views, adding:

"After being publicly complimented, and with every chance of promotion, it's an infernal shame to drag you out of the service!"

"It's not only useless, but dangerous to attempt to argue the matter," replied Harry, "and if he were in good health, and I should insist on remaining, my sister would suffer for it."

That ended George's opposition, and after a minute's mournful silence, the midshipman continued:

"If you can obtain my immediate discharge, it will be the best kindness you can show me."

"I fear that cannot be obtained until we reach Malta, but I will see what can be done," replied George, and he at once sought Laurie, who in turn invoked the aid of Decatur. The latter, although angry at the obstinate selfishness and dislike of America, shown by the sick man, promised to obtain Harry's discharge.

Next day, however, George was informed that the matter could not be attended to then—other and much more important matters were, and would be for some time, engaging the commodore's attention.

CHAPTER XX.

TWO CHALLENGES.

THE important matters, referred to as delaying attention to Harry's discharge, were brought about by the peace overtures made by the Bashaw on the arrival of the squadron.

The capture of Derne, and the approach of General Eaton by land, while the largest squadron that had ever appeared before Tripoli menaced him by sea, alarmed the wily Yusef, and caused him to consider the advisability of coming to terms.

"Well," said George, after communicating the message he had received, "I don't see how your uncle can blame you for the delay. If he is in a hurry, he can leave at once—there are English ships about here frequently. You can follow when discharged."

This was suggested to Mr. Lee, but he would not listen to it, and before the negotiations were concluded, asked for the discharge of another man—Surgeon Jones, whom he wished to have accompany and attend him. He had taken a fancy to the dwarf, who had treated him kindly and skillfully, and who, moreover, was a British subject.

Jones, on his part, was tired of ship life, and had agreed, in case a treaty was signed, to accompany Mr. Lee to Madeira, where he was offered a good home and plenty of money to establish a business.

At length, on the 4th of June, 1805, the officers and crew of the Philadelphia were released, and a treaty signed by which the payment of tribute, and the system of making slaves of Christians captured in war, were abolished.

This treaty was religiously adhered to until the War of 1812, when the Barbary States, presuming that the United States had its hands full with England, again began operations on American commerce, but had scarcely more than begun when Decatur—risen to the rank of commodore—swooped down upon them, and soon ended all further attempts in that direction.

As soon as the treaty was signed, the discharges of Harry and Jones were obtained, but, as there was no English ship in the vicinity, Mr. Lee decided to accompany the squadron to Malta, where the commodore had considerable business to transact.

On the way to Malta, there was a great deal of talk between the "three inseparables" as to their future movements. The war being over, there would be nothing worth doing for some time—so they thought—and each intended to apply for a long leave of absence.

Decatur intended to use his in visiting his promised bride, Eugenie de Morny, in Paris.

Laurie's mind was fixed on Naples and the girl he had saved from being burnt, and George had not forgotten Laura Lee.

Of the three, Decatur was the only one who avowed his real object, while George was the only one who afterward did apply for leave of absence.

Laurie and George both declared they would like to visit Paris with Decatur, and then all three would visit Harry and Jones in Madeira and their friends in Naples.

If this were a love story, the balance had better be left unread, for, on reaching Malta, Decatur received a letter announcing the sudden

death of the fair girl whom he expected to make his wife.

This was a terrible blow to the warm-hearted Decatur, and he became so unlike his usual bright energetic self as to cause much comment among his comrades, for, except Laurie and George, none knew the secret of his sorrow.

A few days after the arrival of the squadron at Malta, Mr. Lee, with Tom Jones and Harry, sailed for Madeira.

The evening previous to their sailing, Decatur, Laurie and Spence called at the lodgings Mr. Lee had taken immediately on arriving, but, as he was not feeling well, the three friends remained only a short time, and left with a promise to visit Madeira in the near future.

Laurie and George were relieved until next morning, and while accompanying Decatur back to the ship they entered a *café*.

The three were in uniform, and a whisper quickly passed around the crowded room that one was Decatur; but the latter, unconscious of the interest he excited, remained only a few minutes, and, telling his friends that he preferred to be alone, bade them good-night with a very dejected air.

The room was crowded with English officers—naval and military—and three of the latter were on the opposite side of the table at which Laurie and George seated themselves.

"By Jove!" exclaimed one of the officers, a fine-looking fellow about Laurie's age, "by Jove! I fail to see where the 'Fiery' Decatur comes in. He looks more like a sick cow—eh, Jack?"

"Ya-as," responded Jack, a still younger and rather dandified cornet. "Doesn't look as though he would charge a half-dozen old women."

Laurie, glaring across the table, demanded, angrily:

"Are you referring to Captain Decatur, sir?"

"Was really he Captain Decatur—the famous, fiery Decatur?" asked the first speaker, in a most provoking tone.

"Had he heard your ungentlemanly remarks, you would have little reason to doubt it!" exclaimed Laurie.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the lieutenant.

"Precisely what I said—that you would have no reason to doubt the identity of Captain Decatur had he heard your ungentlemanly, cowardly remarks," calmly replied Laurie.

"Cowardly!" cried the other.

"Yes—cowardly! You would not dare use those words if Captain—"

"You lie, sir!" interrupted the lieutenant.

The words were scarcely uttered, when the untasted wine—glass and all—that had been standing before Laurie, struck the speaker full in the face.

In an instant the place was in an uproar. The half-blinded lieutenant tried to draw his sword, but friends restrained him.

Laurie was now the coolest man in the room—outwardly—and as soon as the excitement had subsided a little, arose and addressing the cornet in tones of the most withering contempt said:

"As for you, you are the most unmitigated ass I've ever met, and not fit to clean the boots of the gentleman you so foully defamed!"

"George! attend to either or both of these—gentlemen!" and flinging several cards on the table, Laurie stalked out of the *café*.

A half hour later, George met Laurie at the inn where they had arranged to spend the night.

"You are challenged by both," said George. "The cornet is Lord Manners, and the lieutenant is—"

"Never mind—I don't care who they are!" interrupted Laurie. "Go back, George, and give them the choice of weapons, if they will agree to to-morrow at daybreak. Any place they like will suit me. Go, like a good fellow, and don't forget it must be to-morrow, at daybreak!"

An hour later, George returned. "Pistols—at daybreak—I'll show you the place!" he said on entering.

CHAPTER XXI.

ONE KILLED—TWO WOUNDED.

LAURIE had a double object in insulting both the lieutenant and cornet, and forcing the duels for next morning. The first prevented George from interfering, and the second kept the news from reaching the officers of the squadron—particularly Decatur.

Spence suspected this, and was more than a little angry, but he also suspected something else, and wished to talk about the duels. Laurie, however, would not listen to him.

"George," he said, "I'm going to turn in—"

you arrange to have us called in time—now don't try to spoil my sleep by talking.

"Good-night!"

With the last word, George was pushed out of the room, and the door locked.

The Gentleman never used profane language, but he came very near swearing as he turned away from the door.

"Never mind—I'll tell him in the morning," he muttered, as he went to arrange for the early duel.

As soon as Spence was gone, Laurie sat down and began to write letters—one to his father and mother, one to Decatur, and one to the girl in Naples—Agnes Mackay.

It was eleven o'clock, when George returned after arranging for the two duels. It was just before daybreak, when he rapped on Laurie's door.

"One minute, George!" cried Laurie, as he sealed the last of the three long letters.

"Now, we must hurry," he continued, as he admitted Spence. "They will furnish the pistols, of course!"

"Yes, yes! I want to talk—"

"Don't! We'll be late, my boy! Come, now hurry along," and Spence was compelled to defer his proposed talk.

The place of meeting was only a half mile distant, and despite George's efforts to "say his say," the carriage reached the field before he could accomplish his purpose.

Laurie would not listen to anything in any way approaching the business in hand.

The parties reached the field simultaneously, and as Laurie stepped from the carriage he said:

"Here, take care of these letters, George. If anything happens, see to their delivery."

Had Spence looked at the superscription of the Naples, the letter duels would have waited until he did have his "say" with Laurie, but the other seconds were already waiting for him, and thrusting the letters into his pocket he joined them.

Notwithstanding that the lieutenant was the first to quarrel with Laurie, it had been decided by a committee of officers that the insult to Lord Manners was the worst, because deliberate, while the other was hot-tempered and provoked. Therefore, Lord Manners was to have the first shot—and few could surpass him with the pistol.

The ground was quickly measured off, the pistols handed to the principals, and then one of the English seconds, who had won the toss, gave the word:

"One—two—three—fire!"

As the word was given, and Laurie, pulled the trigger, his right foot slipped on the still wet grass—and that saved his life.

Lord Manners, still full of anger, had aimed for Laurie's heart, and he seldom missed his mark.

As it was, the bullet tore across Laurie's ribs, and he arose bleeding profusely.

Laurie was not a particularly good pistol shot, but my lord received a bullet in the shoulder, as the result of the exchange.

"This has gone far enough," said the English surgeon, as after binding up Lord Manners's shoulder, he hastened to Laurie.

"I insist on my shot!" savagely exclaimed the lieutenant.

"With all the pleasure in the world," said Laurie, who had caught the words, and addressing the surgeon:

"Kindly step aside for a moment—then I'll be at your service."

And to Spence:

"Quick, George! Put it through while I'm able to stand!"

Knowing the nature of his friend, George "put it through." The second pair of pistols were handed to the principals, and by a tremendous effort, Laurie stood steady at the mark until the word was again given, although his sight failed him as he fired.

Again both men fell—one to rise no more.

Laurie's blind shot had struck his opponent fair between the eyes, killing him almost instantly, while he had, himself, been hit again in the left side.

When Laurie recovered consciousness he was at sea—on board the Congress, bound for New York.

He gained strength rapidly, owing to a naturally magnificent constitution, which had never been abused, and before reaching home, was able to attend to his duties. He had no idea of the effect of his second shot—supposing from his condition that it had gone wild, but the day before they reached port, while talking about the intended trip to Europe, he said:

"I suppose Steve won't care to go with us, now, poor fellow. It was a hard blow."

"By the by, George, *who was the second fellow I fought with?*"

"Oh, what does it matter?" returned Spence, adding:

"Do you know, Laurie, I don't think I'll make that trip, after all."

There was a something in Spence's way of saying this, that attracted Laurie's attention, and quietly, but firmly, he returned to the question:

"Who was the second man, George?"

"Tell him, George;—it must be done sooner or later," urged Decatur, who had approached unnoticed, and Spence replied:

"Laurie, I tried to tell you what I thought—what I suspected, but you refused to hear me."

"The second man you fought was Aleck Mackay—brother of Alice Mackay!"

"Good heavens! I'm sorry I didn't listen to you," exclaimed Laurie, and smilingly continued:

"What did he say about it, George? Did he know you?"

"No—he was killed," solemnly replied Spence.

They were standing on the quarter-deck, leaning over the rail, and but for Decatur's quickness, Laurie would have pitched over into the sea.

CHAPTER XXII.

"YOU ARE WANTED IN NAPLES."

WHEN the Congress arrived at New York, among all on board, the three who were most warmly welcomed by the people, exhibited the least joy.

Decatur, the hero of the hour, looked sad amid the storms of cheers that greeted his arrival. So, too, did Laurie and Spence—the latter through sheer sympathy; and, at the public dinners and receptions, people wondered at the remarkably quiet demeanor of these gallant fellows—the heroes of so many daring exploits, but no one suspected the cause.

All three were glad when the excitement died out, and they were permitted to retire to their homes.

Gentleman George went home to Philadelphia with his uncle, who had come post-haste to New York, on hearing of his arrival.

In Philadelphia, George underwent a second series of dinners and receptions—this time, however, in private, and, therefore, all the more trying on "the Gentleman," who, being alone, found himself in the position he most detested—the "lion" of every assemblage where he was forced to appear.

Everything has an end, however, and as soon as the Philadelphians tired of their pet, Mr. Spence, proud and delighted over his young nephew's successful career, willingly consented to make a trip to Europe—to Madeira in particular.

Decatur had a great deal of official business to transact in New York and Philadelphia, and remained with the Lawrences when in the former city—as did Captain Stewart, who arrived shortly after them.

The secret sorrow of Decatur and Laurie served to strengthen their friendship, which was broken only when the latter, in 1813, with his last breath uttered the famous order, which is graven on his monument in St. Paul's churchyard, and which became the motto of the American sailor:

"DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP!"

Before sailing for Europe, George, of course, visited his two friends in New York.

"We shall visit Naples while abroad," remarked George, in the course of conversation regarding his contemplated trip, adding:

"I may have some news for you when I get back."

Laurie shook his head doubtfully, but made no response, and the other continued:

"Why not come with us? You don't look like yourself, you are rusting for want of something to occupy your mind, and the change would be beneficial."

"I understand what you are driving at, George," returned Laurie, with a sad smile, "but it's useless. I could never face her, with his blood on my hands."

"The circumstances are well known to his comrades, and nothing could be said to your discredit," protested George, adding:

"You were almost unconscious when you took your position for the second duel."

"I certainly could not see him," assented Laurie, mournfully.

"Precisely what Lord Manners said—your shot was a blind one."

"He wasn't such a bad fellow, either—that Lord Manners," continued George. "Your bullet made an ugly wound in his shoulder, but he

took charge of everything, and undertook to place the matter in a fair light before the Mackay family."

Laurie did not respond, although his face lightened up a little, and George concluded to drop the subject for the time being.

Next day, however, he returned to the subject, asking:

"Why not accompany us to Europe, Laurie? It will certainly be better than sitting here, brooding over what might have been—and yet may be."

"George, I could not face her. 'Twas I provoked the duel."

Laurie's tone was hopeless—so hopeless, that his friend contented himself with saying:

"Well, we are going to Naples, anyhow—that I am, now, determined upon, but, before I go, you must promise to join me at Naples the moment I send for you—if I do."

"Willingly, George, but it will only cause pain on both sides."

And so the matter was left—George and his uncle sailing the following day.

For three months, nothing was heard from the European tourist, and during this time Laurie occupied himself in assisting Decatur in straightening out his work of preparing the Congress for cruising, and in consultation with the Naval Department officials.

At length this business was finished, and a visit from Captain Stewart brought Decatur and Laurie to Philadelphia.

While in the Quaker City, all three called on Miss Spence—George's aunt, and his uncle's housekeeper—to inquire if anything had been heard from the tourists.

The old lady was delighted to meet the friends of her nephew, regarding whom she had heard so much, but especially to find that Laurie was one of the party.

"Oh, it so fortunate you came, Mr. Lawrence!" she exclaimed. "George had time to write only a few lines, when he learned that he would miss the vessel that brought this" (holding up a letter) "if he delayed any longer, so he closed at once by asking me to tell you that you are wanted in Naples."

"In Naples!"

"Yes—they arrived there two days before this letter was written, and—oh, what a state I've been in since I received it!"

"He did not say where to find you, but I had heard him speak of meeting you in New York, and I did not know whether it would do to trust a servant with the message."

"I had almost decided to go myself, when fortunately you arrived, and saved me from undertaking that long, wearisome journey!"

Wanted at Naples! What could it mean?

Laurie was listening to Miss Spence, like one in a dream—and paying about as much attention, after hearing George's message.

To cover his friend's impolite abstraction, Decatur began talking to Miss Spence, and that kindly old lady, being much relieved by the easy delivery of George's message, forgot all about it, and was soon deeply engaged in conversation,—the fate of the gallant and unfortunate Richard Somer (whose mother resided in Philadelphia), furnishing a most interesting, though sorrowful, topic.

"Your old friend, Captain Dare, has obtained leave of absence, and is going to take his wife to the South of France," remarked Captain Stewart, while Miss Spence and Decatur were talking.

"Mrs. Dare's health is poor, and the doctor's recommend a change of climate," continued Stewart. "They have decided to sail next week, and Dare has bought back the Hawk from the Government for the trip."

"Why not sail with them?"

Laurie started at the suggestion. He had not called on his friend—at one time his best and only friend—for some time, and he had heard nothing of the intended trip.

"I'll call on them at once," he exclaimed, after a moment's hesitation, and when, after taking leave of Miss Spence, the idea was communicated to Decatur, the latter approved of it.

Accordingly, leaving his friends to call on the sorrowing mother of Somers, Laurie posted back to New York.

Calling on Captain Dare, Laurie found Stewart's information was correct. He then told his friend, and former patron and protector, the story of the duels at Malta, and of George's message.

"All the world loves a lover." Before Laurie could explain why he had told the story, he was being pressed to accompany Captain and Mrs. Dare, which he did, sailing a week later.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RUNAWAY ACCIDENT.

In the days when a trip between Philadelphia and New York was spoken of as a "long and wearisome journey," crossing the Western Ocean was not the holiday affair that it now is, and Laurie's company did much to relieve the tedium of the voyage.

After a rapid and uneventful voyage, during which Laurie was as changeable as the wind—now grave, and a little later gay; quiet one hour, and full of feverish excitement the next—The Hawk dropped anchor in the Bay of Naples.

It was late in the afternoon when the beautiful vessel (which Captain Dare had captured when little more than a mere boy), reached her destination, but Laurie was anxious to get ashore.

"Let us take a walk through the city," he suggested, adding:

"Mrs. Dare must be tired of being cooped up so long—I am."

"And so am I—as you have surmised," said Mrs. Dare, who had overheard Laurie's suggestion, as she came on deck.

"You are one too many for me; and, being in the minority, I submit to your pleasure," and turning to the boatswain, Captain Dare ordered the boat to be got in readiness, while preparations were being made by himself and wife, and his friend, for going ashore.

Mr. Mackay's new home was situated on the outskirts of the city, so Laurie had no fear of meeting any of the family, and George had not indicated where he was to be found.

"I shall not try to find him until to-morrow," remarked Laurie, as the party stepped ashore.

"You will have no trouble," returned Dare, "his address is certain to be found at the American Consul's office."

This proved to be the case, but Laurie did not find it necessary to make any inquiries, for before twenty-four hours had elapsed, all Naples was talking about him, and George found him.

Laurie's celebrity, or notoriety, came about through an accident which nearly cost him his life.

After landing, the party sauntered about through the city until evening, when Captain Dare suggested dining at a hotel, where he intended engaging rooms next day—and they did so.

The hotel adjoined the Park, and the music of the band that played there every evening, floated in through the window of the room where the meal was served—which was on the second floor.

After they were through, the three went out on the balcony to enjoy the music—and then came the accident.

Among the carriages passing along the broad driveway was one containing three ladies—one old, the others quite young—and, as this passed the band-stand, the music ended with a grand crash that startled the horses.

The sudden jump of the frightened animals threw the driver back into the open carriage, and, freed from all control, the horses broke away on a gallop, their gait being constantly accelerated by the idiotic yells of the spectators.

The hotel was situated near the band-stand—being chiefly patronized because of its proximity to the music—and the light being still quite good, Laurie saw what had occurred.

He, also, saw that the occupants of the carriage were Mrs. Mackay and her daughters.

"It's Agnes!" he exclaimed, as he bounded over the rail of the balcony into the Park.

On came the frightened horses, tearing along at a tremendous gait until they were opposite the hotel. Then Laurie sprang at the head of the near horse, catching by the mane, and was dragged about fifty yards, when the sharp report of a pistol rung through the Park, and horse and man went down—the horse on top.

For a moment or two after Laurie cleared the balcony rail, Captain Dare was too surprised to move. Then, before his wife could object, he, too, bounded over the rail, and started in pursuit of Laurie and the carriage, drawing a pistol as he ran.

Young and active, Dare gained on the runaway, but perceiving that Laurie was in danger of being thrown and trampled on at any moment, he stood stock still for a moment, and fired—at the wrong horse, which he killed.

Had Dare killed the off horse, Laurie would have had little difficulty in subduing the other. As it was, the one that was hit stumbled forward, and after throwing him, fell upon him.

A half-ton is a pretty heavy weight—if you

are under it, and the horse that fell upon Laurie weighed between ten and eleven hundred pounds.

His arm was broken; he was badly cut and bruised about both head and body, and he was unconscious when picked up, and carried back to the hotel.

No trouble was experienced in stopping the horse that remained after Dare had fired, and, when Laurie was taken from under his mate, the ladies alighted and followed those who were carrying him to the hotel.

Captain Dare had gone ahead and engaged the rooms he had intended to occupy next day, at once, and when the bearers arrived, Laurie was received by Mrs. Dare.

A doctor, who was stopping at the hotel, and who had witnessed the affair, had followed the men who carried Laurie to Dare's apartments, to render whatever aid was needed. He had just finished a hasty examination of Laurie, when Mrs. Mackay and her daughter entered.

"Well, doctor, what's the damage?" asked Dare.

"His arm is broken, he has been badly bruised and his head—well, I can't say anything about that just yet, but he has received a very severe shock, and will require most careful attendance."

"He shall have it!" exclaimed Dare.

"I will see to that—he will not—" began Mrs. Dare, when she was interrupted by Agnes Mackay, who, with flushed cheeks and suspiciously bright eyes, exclaimed:

"No, madam, I will see to that!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"HE WAS NOT MY BROTHER."

THE curious crowd that followed the unconscious Laurie to Dare's apartments had served to screen Mrs. Mackay's party from observation until Agnes spoke, and then those around the bed turned in surprise to look at her.

Mrs. Dare knew nothing of the duels, but, being a woman, she grasped the situation, to a great extent, where a man would have been completely at a loss.

"Why, Agnes!" she exclaimed, kissing the trembling girl, and then observing Mrs. Mackay and Julia in the background, cordially welcomed them, while in a quiet aside she requested Dare to get rid of the crowd.

"We were in the runaway," explained Agnes, as she took possession of the chair that Mrs. Dare placed for her, at Laurie's bedside.

"I did not recognize you until Mr. Lawrence cried 'It's Agnes!' as he jumped from the balcony into the Park," returned Mrs. Dare.

"We saw him jump, but, of course, did not recognize him," quietly remarked Julia, adding: "We were not aware of Mr. Lawrence's arrival. Has he been here for any length of time?"

"We arrived this afternoon—Mr. Lawrence, my husband and myself."

Mrs. Mackay was a Neapolitan; before her lay the man who had killed her son. It had happened almost accidentally, and everything connected with the sad affair had been fair and above-board—so Lord Manners had assured her—but her son was dead, and, except to return Mrs. Dare's greeting, she had, up to this point, preserved a grim, unbending silence.

Now she softened a little, and asked:

"Is Mr.—Is he dangerously injured?"

"It is impossible to say, until I have made a more thorough examination, madam," replied the doctor, who was talking to Dare.

Before anything further could be said, the door of the outer room was thrown open without ceremony, and in rushed Spence and Harry Lee, followed by Tom Jones, Mr. Mackay and Lord Manners.

George's excitement was caused by the exaggerated report of the accident, and Mr. Mackay—though he entered in a more leisurely manner—was not much calmer than the anxious Gentleman, who excitedly demanded:

"Is he badly hurt? They told us he was dead—that all were more or less hurt!"

"Not so bad as that," smilingly replied Dare.

At that moment Laurie's eyes opened. He smiled faintly on seeing George standing at the foot of the bed, and whispered:

"Is she safe?"

But one person in the room heard the question—although the blush that dyed Agnes Mackay's cheek, gave all a pretty fair idea of its purport.

"We were not hurt, Mr. Lawrence."

Agnes, for the benefit of the listeners, said this quite loudly, as George came forward with:

"What is it, Laurie?"

Laurie, however, paid no attention to the

question. Like one electrified, he had turned on hearing the voice of the fair girl beside him, and, perceiving this, George fell back to his former position.

Whether it was the presence of so many spectators, or the change which he naturally supposed had taken place in her disposition toward him, since her brother's death, Laurie could not decide, but whatever the cause, Agnes met his startled gaze with the greatest composure.

"She's full of grit!" was the mental comment of the Gentleman, who had not sent for his friend without cause.

"I was a fool to dream of forgiveness!" thought Laurie, and with that hopeless thought came unconsciousness.

A low, startled cry from Agnes called attention to the sufferer's condition, and disregarding professional etiquette, the dwarf-surgeon ordered:

"Clear out! every mother's son of ye, except this young lady. You are killing the patient with your talking and staring!" and turning to Agnes:

"You are going to nurse him, I take it?"

"I am—he saved my life."

"Very cute!" mentally observed George, as, with the others, he entered the adjoining room.

"How did you know who it was?" asked Dare.

"We were out sailing, and as we came in, I saw the Hawk, hailed her, and learned that you had gone ashore."

"We had inquired at several hotels, before the news of the runaway reached us, and then we came at a rate that made the people think runaways were on top this P. M."

"Hello! Here come the two uncles."

As George concluded, Mr. Spence and Mr. Lee, who had taken matters quite coolly, entered and were introduced to Dare.

Jones now came from the inner room, carefully closing the door behind him, and announced:

"He's conscious—the arm is set—he's badly bruised—but he's not injured internally."

Then, in the nearest approach he could make to a whisper, he said to Spence:

"The best medicine I can prescribe is sitting beside his bed—but I can't risk more than five minutes of that—it's too powerful."

"I understand," returned George, with a very knowing look.

About the same time Agnes Mackay was saying, with downcast eyes, and flaming cheeks:

"He was not my brother—and—and—Lord Manners said you were not to blame—and—and we—I believed him."

CHAPTER XXV.

AGNES'S STORY.

THE astounding statement made by Agnes—that Alec Mackay was not her brother, was called forth by Laurie's pleading question:

"Can you—will you ever forgive me, Agnes? I did not know his name, and had not the faintest idea that he was your brother."

Then came Agnes's statement followed by:

"Nor am I in any way related to the family whose name I bear, and with whom I have lived since infancy."

"Mr. Mackay, who has been a second father to me, is simply my guardian, having taken charge of me, and some property left by mother, who died a month after my father, when I was an infant."

Laurie listened, scarcely comprehending what Agnes was saying. It was enough for him to know that she was not Alec Mackay's sister.

"I did not know anything of this until quite recently, when Mr. Mackay decided it was time to tell me, as his guardianship ceases within a year."

"And then you will be free—can do as you please?" asserted, rather than asked, Laurie, with an eager meaning that brought the blood to Agnes's cheeks.

"Hush! Some one is coming in," she warned, glad of the interruption, and Jones, after much fumbling with the door-knob, returned to his patient.

The patient—quite the reverse of his nurse—was not at all thankful for the interruption, and, guessing the reason, the surgeon favored him with a broad smile, as he turned to the rather confused nurse, saying:

"I think our patient is looking better—don't you agree with me?"

"Oh, yes," murmured Agnes, studying the pattern of the carpet—to the intense delight of the little giant, who continued:

"That's an ugly bruise on the forehead—sup-

pose you bathe it with this warm water. You will be certain to cause less pain than I would."

"I will go for more warm water."

Chuckling over the increased confusion of Agnes, Jones hurried out of the room, but must have forgotten his errand, for when he returned at the expiration of a half-hour he brought no water—nor did he refer to it until it was apparent that both patient and nurse had failed to notice his neglect.

During the surgeon's absence, quite an interesting conversation took place between Agnes and Laurie.

It began when Agnes, with a feeble attempt to appear at ease, made a dab at the patient's forehead, and stuck the wet cloth in his eye.

"Oh, dear! I hope you are not hurt, Mr. Lawrence!" she exclaimed.

"Miss Mackay, what do you mean by mistering me?" demanded Laurie, in a very severe tone.

"Well—then—Laurie."

"That's nearer to it," gravely commented the patient, and after regarding the blushing girl very attentively for a moment or two, continued:

"Now, if you were to say 'dear Laurie, I think it would sound still better—don't you?'"

He captured one of the hands nervously toying with the now forgotten wet cloth, and repeated the question.

Although the answer was almost inaudible, Laurie appeared to be perfectly satisfied.

That was the beginning.

When the dwarf announced his presence outside the door, by holding a two-minute conversation with an imaginary servant, Agnes was saying:

"Very well. Since you insist upon it, I will agree to leave this country as soon as I am of age—but not a word until then! Promise me that, Laurie—dear!" with a tender dwelling on the last word.

That was the ending—and Jones entered.

After surveying the demure-looking nurse, and noting the proud, happy air of the patient, the surgeon, with a quizzical glance from one to the other, upset both by saying:

"I'm glad you bathed this hurt, Miss Mackay. It looks much worse than I thought it was at first, but the bathing you did will soon begin to have effect."

Agnes flushed guiltily, and then turned pale. Laurie was startled for the moment, but, perceiving the lurking grin on the dwarf's countenance, reassured the girl who had just promised to be his wife, saying:

"Don't mind, Agnes! He's only trying to frighten you."

"Agnes," repeated Jones, innocently, "what a pretty name, *Mister Lawrence*."

"Get out!" shouted Laurie, laughing, despite the fact that the dwarf's words caused Agnes to blush furiously, and evidently pained her.

The keen-eyed dwarf, observing the girl's distress, instantly changed his tone, and in a most respectful manner, said:

"I shall have to leave you in charge, Miss Mackay, while I see to the preparation of some medicines."

"Shall I send Mrs. Dare to keep you company?"

"Yes, if you please," replied Agnes, grateful for the change.

"He will be silent—don't worry!" assured Laurie, as the door closed on Jones.

Immediately after Mrs. Dare entered, and one look of the bride of a year satisfied her of the state of affairs between Laurie and Agnes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CALLED HOME—DISAPPOINTED—BACK TO EUROPE.

UNDER the tender care of Agnes and Mrs. Dare, and the careful treatment of Jones, Laurie soon was able to leave his room.

Mr. Mackay had made no objection to his (adopted) daughter's nursing Laurie, nor did Mrs. Mackay, though she looked somewhat angry when Agnes announced her intention of remaining until the patient was fully recovered.

"This is the second time he has been injured on our account, and the least we can do is to assist in bringing him back to health and strength," she said, very quietly, but firmly.

Mr. Mackay looked at her curiously, sighed and bowed.

He was a just man, and while Laurie's chance-shot had blighted many a fond hope and saddened his life, he did not blame the latter for what had happened, though he could never again meet the young commander on the terms of their former acquaintance.

The beginning and end of the first interview—after the second rescue—between Agnes and Laurie was a fair index to many more that followed before the former decided that the time had arrived when she should return home.

"You will hardly care to call," she said, "and we, of course, neither give nor go to any form of entertainment, at present."

"But I must see you!" protested Laurie.

"You shall, dear. Allow Mrs. Dare to dictate what you shall do, and you will meet me often enough."

Mrs. Dare, however, had little chance to arrange any meetings, for, two days after Agnes had gone home, there came a letter from Decatur.

"I hope affairs have turned out as you wished," wrote Decatur, "but, in any event, return as soon as possible, as you have every chance of obtaining a ship."

"You had better start at once," said George; "such chances are not cropping up every day!"

"You are right—there are five captains for every ship," commented Captain Dare, adding: "Go at once, Laurie."

Thus adjured, Laurie inclosed Decatur's letter with another from himself to Agnes.

The answer came in the shape of Agnes herself.

"You are going at once, of course," she said, very quietly.

"I shall—since you look at it in that way," replied Laurie, adding:

"You will be a help instead of a hindrance, as are the majority of soldiers' and sailors' wives."

Blushing a little at the prospective title, Agnes said:

"I am just as much an American as you. You are an officer—and—and—" (defiantly) "you have to wait a year, anyhow."

So Laurie returned to the United States without delay.

The change in Laurie's appearance was sufficient for Decatur.

"You need not tell me," he said, as he clasped Laurie's hand, "your face reveals your success."

"It is true—but 'tis a strange story, though not a long one. You shall hear it when we get home."

"And George?"

"Is in Naples with his uncle, aunt, Harry, Jones, and last, but most decidedly not least, Laura."

"He is very young to be thinking of marriage," smilingly observed Decatur.

Laurie made no reply—he was not much older than George, and the remark cut both ways.

At home, Laurie received a joyful welcome, all the more so for the change his short visit abroad had wrought in his spirits and appearance.

For months before leaving New York, Laurie had been looking sad and depressed. Now he was bright and cheerful.

"Nothing short of a petticoat could have done it," averred old Captain Adams—Mrs. Dare's uncle, who called daily on the Lawrences.

This, and the story of the runaway, gave Mrs. Lawrence a clew, which she followed until, between Decatur and Laurie, she had managed to obtain the whole story.

Then a letter was dispatched to Mrs. Dare, which, as that lady remarked, was one mass of bristling interrogation points—all regarding Agnes.

Mrs. Dare's reply came in due course, and was so satisfactory that Mrs. Lawrence wisely decided to say nothing until she was consulted on the subject.

Laurie, meantime, had been disappointed in receiving the expected command.

There were a great many unemployed senior officers, and when Decatur was left idle, he could hardly expect employment.

"I'm still on leave, Steve," said Laurie, after a month's waiting, "and I'm going to use up the balance of the time by going back to Naples. Will you come with me?"

"How will you go?" asked Decatur.

"I hardly know. If I could get a vessel, a good, fast-sailing schooner, I would engage her, and take my parents with me."

"There is just such a vessel lying in the Hudson, near the Battery."

"Indeed! Well, if I engage her, will you obtain leave and join me?"

Decatur hesitated for a full minute before deciding that he would. He wished to visit first the family, and then the grave of Eugenie de Morny, and this was a good opportunity.

"But it will be risky work—approaching the Coast of France, under the American flag," he said, after telling Laurie his reasons for making the voyage.

"Hang the risk! We'll go armed, and, if we can't outsail anything that attempts to interfere with us, why we'll try to return any compliments that may be paid us."

"And your parents?"

"Oh, we will leave them with Dare, in Naples, before going to France."

"All right. Better go at once, and ascertain if the vessel suits, and can be engaged," advised Decatur.

The vessel did suit, and was engaged before Laurie left her to go home and acquaint his parents of the proposed trip—and his mother of the object, which was to bring home Agnes as his wife.

Although pleased to be asked, both declined to make the voyage—Mrs. Lawrence because of her dread of the sea, and Mr. Lawrence because he did not care to leave his wife alone.

Except to get in stores for the voyage, the schooner needed nothing. She had been—indeed was then—a French privateer, and was well-armed and well-manned, carrying a crew of fifty stout fellows of almost every nationality—even English.

The captain was a Frenchman of the name of Fleury, who spoke English fluently, as did every man on board, and the only change Laurie wished to make was in the name of the schooner.

To this Captain Fleury offered no objection, and when she sailed a week after her engagement the schooner bore the name Agnes.

"I'll bet a sixpence we don't make the voyage without trouble of some kind," said the second mate—an American, of the name of Baker.

"Why do you think so?" asked Decatur, who, coming on deck at the moment, overheard the words.

"Well, sir, because I've never known a change to be made in a vessel's name, without a change in her luck—and as the Josephine, this has been a lucky vessel."

Decatur smiled, and said:

"I'll take your bet, Mr. Baker."

It was a coincidence, of course, but Baker won the bet.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST CRUISE IN COMPANY.

CAPTAIN FLEURY had declared the Agnes to be not only a staunch sea-boat, but able to show her heels to anything afloat, and, although no heavy weather had been encountered to prove her seaworthiness, the rate at which the schooner sped on her course, was sufficient to induce both Decatur and Laurie to accept the captain's statement as nothing more than the actual truth.

As his parents did not accompany him, Laurie decided to go to France before visiting Naples.

"There will then be no necessity of stopping on the return trip," he explained to Decatur, in giving the reason for the change in his plans.

At this period, American commerce was suffering a great deal from the injustice of both England and France—as well as the jealousy of the former nation.

Between 1803 and 1806, the foreign carrying trade of the United States increased nearly fivefold, while that of England fell off in a corresponding ratio.

Vexed and mortified at this, and caring little for justice, if the supremacy of the British merchant-marine could be maintained, the ministry, in the summer of 1805, revived an old edict, known as THE RULE OF 1756, which they impudently asserted was a part of the law of nations!

This edict, which, by the treaty of 1801, had been so modified as to render it comparatively harmless, forbade the vessels of neutral nations to trade with the colonies of France, or the provinces of any other country with which Great Britain was at war.

Now, Great Britain was at war with France, and this edict was revived in full force!

Napoleon Bonaparte retaliated by issuing a decree blockading the British Isles.

No warning was given neutral nations, and many American vessels were seized and condemned as prizes.

France was brought to a realization of the injustice of this, by the celebrated EMBARGO ACT, passed by Congress, December 21st, 1807, but it required 1812 to bring England to her senses.

It was for these reasons that Decatur declared it would be dangerous to approach the French

Coast, and when Laurie announced the change in his plans, the former said:

"Better go to Naples first, Laurie. I can take ship from there to France, and return without running any risks, while you will be enjoying the society of Miss Mackay."

But no, Laurie would not have it so. The Agnes had been engaged as much to carry Decatur to France, as himself to Naples, he declared.

"All right. Have it your way, but don't make me lose that sixpence if you can avoid it," carelessly replied Decatur.

The Agnes was in the Bay of Biscay when this conversation took place, and they were expecting to make the harbor of La Teste—which it was decided would be the safest—within three days.

Next morning, about half-past ten, the man at the mast-head discovered a sail bearing about west—the Agnes at the time steering eastward under easy sail.

They were now in a dangerous place, and Decatur, recovering some of his former spirits, took charge of the vessel, making Laurie his second in command.

Captain Fleury was a brave man and a skillful seaman, but he and his crew were only too glad to submit to the direction of the two famous fighters, who had hitherto played the part of passengers.

"Tack westward, Laurie!" ordered Decatur, and when the schooner was put about, continued:

"We'll have the weather-gage, at all events."

"Do you know, Laurie, I think a little 'brush' would be worth that sixpence to me."

"Never doubt it!" laughed Laurie. "It's just what you need—what you're aching for."

Half an hour later, the stranger was made out to be a schooner.

"And decidedly English-looking!" reported Laurie, who had been aloft.

About noon, being a little to windward and not far distant, Decatur wore round and ran a little to leeward, when the stranger set English colors.

Decatur wore again, still keeping to the windward of his adversary, and in a few minutes the latter fired a shot, which did no damage.

"Beat to quarters! Stand by to board!" cried Decatur, and while Laurie looked after the loading of the guns and small-arms, the French colors were hoisted.

"We don't know what sort of mettle these fellows" (the crew of the Agnes) "are made of," said Decatur, when Laurie reported everything in readiness. "So, down with those hatches! If they are going to do any running, it will have to be overboard!"

Then in a slow, steady tone that rung clear from stem to stern, he continued:

"Ready, there, with your grappling-irons!"

"Give him all your guns at once—great and small!"

"Helm's alee! Let go—haul!"

Decatur's plan was to board under cover of the smoke of his guns.

For this purpose he issued the last order, intending to pass under the stern of his opponent and give him a raking fire.

As they neared each other the Englishman luffed to and gave the Agnes a broadside, but most of the shot passed over her.

The Agnes, it should have been stated, carried six twelve-pound carronades and one long eighteen on a pivot amidships.

Laurie now sighted and fired the Long Tom, and repeated it again and again, creating no small havoc among the men who crowded the deck of the Englishman.

The latter now showed a disposition to run to leeward, and Decatur, now in his glory, feared that he wished to escape.

To prevent this, Decatur filled away, forcing his bowsprit over the stern of the enemy and his jibboom through the mainsail.

The boarders had been impatiently awaiting the signal, and now Decatur gave the order to board, while Captain Fleury, with the balance of the crew, kept pouring in a destructive fire of musketry.

Decatur was standing aft when he gave the order, and rushed forward to head the boarders, but Laurie snatched that honor from him, and was the first man over the bowsprit and deck of the enemy.

A terrible scene of slaughter followed.

The men fought hand-to-hand with cutlasses and pistols, until the English captain stood face-to-face with Laurie, and within three minutes the latter, who was an expert swordsman, had passed his sword through his opponent.

At about the same moment, the first officer of the Englishman went down before Decatur, and the fight was finished—the conquerors themselves hauling down the English colors.

Both parties fought with unparalleled vigor, and desperate courage—the decks being covered with dead and wounded.

On board the Agnes, there were five killed and twenty wounded, while the Englishman's loss was fifteen killed and fifty-seven wounded—the latter number much more than the original crew of the Agnes!

The vessel had been injured only in the rigging, and making such repairs as were possible, Decatur took charge of the prize, and accompanied by Laurie, ran into La Teste.

Telling Captain Fleury that the English schooner was his, and bidding him await their return, Decatur and Laurie set out for Paris, where a great surprise was in store for the former.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DEAD ALIVE.

It was midday when the travelers arrived in Paris, tired and hungry, and after disposing of a well-prepared meal, to which both did ample justice, they retired to rest.

About five in the afternoon, they dressed and sauntered out to look at the carriages and riders in the Bois de Boulogne.

In a short time they tired of this, and were about to move on, when suddenly Decatur started and turned pale—pale as death.

"Laurie!" he gasped, clutching his friend's arm, "Laurie! Look at that carriage! Do you know—"

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Laurie, looking in the direction indicated. "It's Eugenie de Morny!"

"Was, you mean," corrected an English-speaking Frenchman standing beside them.

"Was?"

The hoarse monosyllable uttered by Decatur, caused the Frenchman to stare.

"Yes, *was*," he replied. "She is now the wife of the gentleman sitting beside her."

"Let us go!" interrupted Decatur, roughly pushing his way through the crowd, and dragging Laurie after him.

Back to the hotel they went, Decatur plunging straight ahead, regardless of the protests and execrations of those whom he drove out of his path.

In his room at the hotel, he ordered a bottle of cognac—but it had no more effect than so much water.

After "Let us go!" Decatur uttered but one word until seven o'clock that night—"Tricked!"

He looked and acted like a madman, and Laurie feared he would commit some desperate deed, but at seven o'clock, he said quite calmly:

"We must leave here at once, Laurie. My own temper warns me that I cannot quit Paris too soon."

"Will you see about a carriage and horses?"

"I will—if you will accompany me downstairs," replied Laurie.

"What d'ye mean?"

"Just what I say. You've been looking and acting like a madman, and I cannot trust to this sudden calm."

Decatur laughed—not at all pleasantly.

"Well—come along, since you won't go alone," he said, leading the way to the hotel office.

While standing at the clerk's desk, two gentlemen approached, and while awaiting their turn, Decatur and Laurie were favored with part of their conversation.

"Strange story, that—about the young duchess fainting at the sight of her former admirer," said one.

"Yes. Is there any truth in it?"

"Oh, there's no doubt about it! When she came back two years ago, you remember, she acted like a nun for a few months, because of some entanglement abroad. Then she plunged into society again, dropped the foreign affair, and took the old duke in exchange for his ducats."

"She will make an interesting widow."

"And she saw the discarded lover yesterday?"

"Yes, he was among the crowd, it seems, and on seeing him the fair Eugenie fainted. It looks as if she had tricked him in some way."

That was all they heard—but it was more than enough, and Laurie feared the effect on Decatur, nor was he relieved by the gay mood in which the latter appeared to be, before the post-chaise was ready.

The mood, however, was not an assumed

one. All the way back to La Teste, Decatur was recklessly gay.

"Drive! Drive! Drive as if the devil and all his imps were riding with you!" he cried, as they entered the post-chaise, adding:

"I feel as if the Old Boy, himself, were sitting on my shoulder, whispering to turn back and make one call—just one!"

Knowing the impulsive character of the speaker, Laurie was filled with alarm, and in response to the startled glance of the coachman, ordered:

"Go ahead! Kill the horses, if necessary! I'll pay for them."

"Don't be alarmed, old Sobersides—I'm making a good fight against the old gentleman," said Decatur, with the same hard laugh.

Traveling night and day, and stopping only for meals, La Teste was reached with Decatur in the same mood.

"Oh, for another privateer!" he exclaimed, as sail was made, and the Agnes got under way for Naples.

He was doomed to be disappointed in this wish—the schooner making a rapid and uneventful run to her destination.

"Come along! You are not fit to be left alone," said Laurie, half-jestingly, as he prepared to go ashore.

"No, I'd rather not."

"Nonsense! The subject of your thoughts is unworthy of your attention—Come along!" urged Laurie.

Reluctantly, Decatur accompanied his friend to the lodgings Captain Dare had engaged, and where both were received with delight.

"You must have become very impatient," slyly remarked Dare, while his wife was writing a note to Agnes.

Laurie looked guilty, and, laughing in an embarrassed way, admitted that he was a little impatient.

Agnes came immediately, in response to her friend's letter, and after a long conversation with Laurie he accompanied her home.

Mr. Mackay looked greatly astonished on seeing Laurie, but giving no heed to this, the latter stated the object of his visit without delay.

"Mr. Mackay, I have come to ask your consent to the marriage of Agnes and myself."

"Your power, as guardian, will terminate in a few months and could then be dispensed with, but I am anxious to return at once, and I trust the unfortunate past will not prevent you from granting my request."

"The marriage will be private and no one—except close friends need know of it."

Mr. Mackay looked troubled. He had suspected what was coming on seeing Laurie, and had an idea that this asking for his permission was a matter of form—that Laurie would marry Agnes at once, whether he consented or not, so he made the best of it, and gave his consent.

Six weeks later, Laurie, accompanied by Dare and his wife, and Decatur, entered the Lawrence residence, and presented Agnes to his mother with:

"Now, mother, you've a daughter, as well as a son."

Of the "three inseparables," Spence lived the longest—dying a captain in 1827.

Decatur was killed in a duel in 1820.

Laurie was killed in 1813 with "Don't give up the ship!" on his lips.

The fate of the gallant Somers, as far as ever known, has been told.

Stewart lived to be a rear-admiral, dying in 1869.

So ends the early career of these celebrated commanders.

THE END.

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